The Heart of Japan

Glimpses of Life and Nature Far From the Travellers' Track in the Land of the Rising Sun

Clarence Ludlow Brownell

Routledge Revivals

The Heart of Japan

This collection of commentaries and reflections on Japanese culture, first published in 1904, was written shortly after the return of two English aristocrats from five years spent immersed in the 'Land of the Rising Sun'. Their intention through these anecdotes – some humorous and charming, others tragic and thought-provoking – was to offer glimpses into the "real inner spirit of the native life," and to provide insights into the remarkable idiosyncrasies of Japanese society during a period of unprecedented change.

Touching on such diverse topics as sport, religion, music, censorship, drama and bathing, *The Heart of Japan* will be of particular interest to students of Japanese, as well as to those intrigued by cultural difference and exchange.

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First published in 1904
by Methuen & Co.

This edition first published in 2014 by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN
and by Routledge
52 Vanderbilt Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

ISBN 13: 978-0-415-74134-7 (hbk)
ISBN 13: 978-1-315-81484-1 (ebk)

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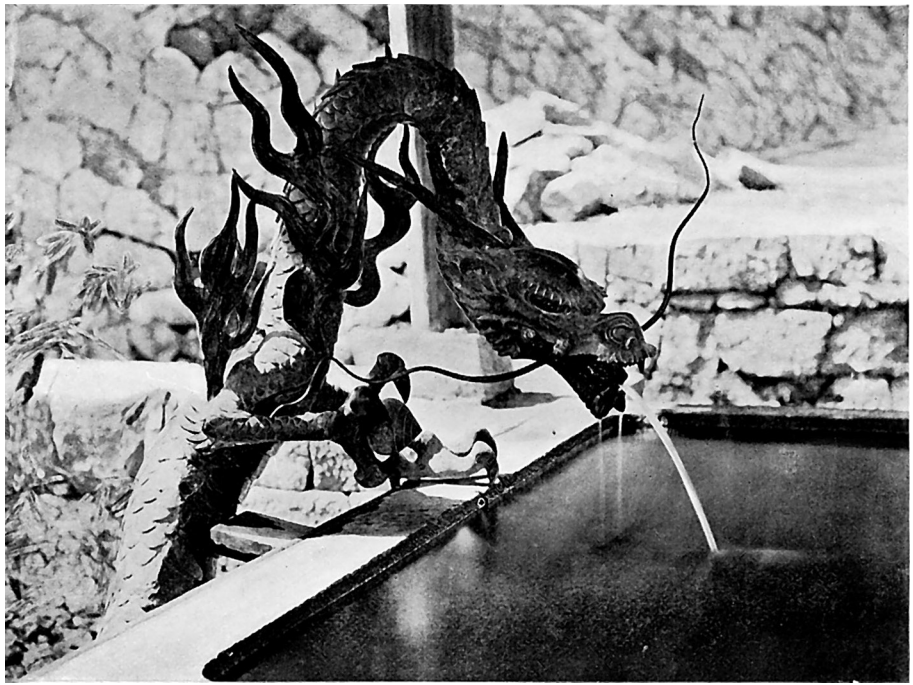

THE FAMOUS DRAGON FOUNTAIN

THE HEART OF JAPAN

GLIMPSES OF LIFE AND NATURE
FAR FROM THE TRAVELLERS' TRACK
IN THE LAND OF THE RISING SUN

BY

CLARENCE LUDLOW BROWNELL

WITH TWENTY-FOUR ILLUSTRATIONS

THIRD EDITION

METHUEN & CO.
36 ESSEX STREET W.C.
LONDON
1904

Taylor & Francis
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TO

CURTIS BROWN

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

WE lived so far from the travellers' track in Japan,—often where no foreigner had been before,—and had seen and heard so much of what seemed to us humorous, tragic, quaint, or thought-worthy, that we dared to believe sometimes that we were getting glimpses of the real inner spirit of the native life—a spirit far different from that of the tourist-worn borders of this ancient and fascinating Land of the Rising Sun.

Whether or not we are flattering ourselves unduly, the five years that one of us spent in the interior of Japan, sometimes teaching English in the Government schools, sometimes idling, always living as the natives live, were crowded with joyous entertainment

In striving to reproduce some faint tint of this charm, it seemed wisest to present each episode or impression separately—here a personal experience, there a story heard in some peasant's hut or among the temples, or from some old warrior of the feudal days, and again a ventured comment, picturing different phases of the life of Japan, one after another, as on a screen—seemingly detached, perhaps, yet knit together by the underlying desire to present the native point of view.

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20 HANOVER SQUARE,
LONDON, W.

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THE HEART OF JAPAN

CHAPTER I

KONO HITO AND THE PRAYER PUMP

GARDNER and I met Kono Hito the first time we went up the west coast. He was the thriftiest man in Japan. Even taken together we were not his equal. He lived near a temple less than one hundred "ri"[1] from Kanazawa. If he had been farther from the temple he would have been just as close, but he might not have discovered the fact to the world, nor have wasted away on account of his unlovely trait.

Kono Hito was a farmer. Like most native farmers, he raised rice. To do so he had to have water, and plenty of it, enough to cover thousands of "tsubo," as the Japanese say. (A "tsubo" is the size of two mats, or thirty-six square feet.) He owned some fifty fields, lying side by side. They were small and fenceless; only low ridges of earth marked the boundaries of the fields, and these ridges, when the rice had grown, were lost to view. At the time of

[1] 1 ri = about 2½ miles.

planting they would be mushy, but at harvest time they would become dry and hard, so that a man could walk along them easily if he had occasion.

Kono's way of cultivating them was to throw seed rice—that is rice kernels in the shell—over the surface of his ponds, where it sprouted, and wove into a tangled mat of deep, rich green. When the rice blades were six inches long, and had well-formed roots, he would disentangle them, and, gathering them in clusters, would plant them in the mud at two-foot intervals, along rows two feet apart and parallel. This made the rows regular, like the lines of a checker board, with a bunch of rice wherever two lines crossed. The board itself was all water at first, and had to remain water until nearly time for harvest, for Kono Hito grew swamp rice only. He said there was no money in upland rice. It was too hard, and would not sell for the cost of growing it.

A drought, therefore, was about as bad a thing as could happen to Kono Hito. He must have water or go to the money lenders, and once he went to them there would be no end of going until they had possession of his rice-fields. Kono Hito knew the fate of borrowers full well, and to save himself from such calamity he built dams above his fields to make reservoirs, he dug ditches from one field to the other, and he observed the Buddhist fast days. In spite of all this, however, his crops turned yellow earlier than those of his neighbour Sono Hito, the rice grower on the opposite side of the road—a highway that passed between their paddy-fields and led to the temple and beyond.

"Komaru domo!" said Kono Hito as he came along this road in his jin-riki-sha one day. "Do shimasho ka?" ("What shall we do?"). But though he spoke to himself of trouble, and asked himself how to avoid it, he did not talk out loud. He sought to succeed by keeping more fast days, working harder in his fields, building tiny shrines, like dolls' houses, at his reservoirs, and bringing the household economy down to such a fine point that Okusama, his wife, dared not lose so much as a grain of rice in a month. But with all his prayers and his skimping, he had not water enough. His fields were brown when Sono Hito's were still green. "Hontoni komaru!" Trouble indeed!

Sono Hito, the meanwhile, was not worrying. He was a patriarch in the "Home of Happy Husbandmen," and never had bad years, even though he kept few fasts and was not more than half careful of his reservoirs.

A lot of folk worked for him, however, and without knowing it, though they were glad in their unconscious service. They were good Buddhists of the Hongwanji sect, passing daily to the grand old temple overlooking the sea. They offered alms to Amida, the Buddha, and ere they offered they washed themselves, as good folk do before they worship. Sono Hito, of course, knew this, for he went himself to the temple sometimes and took the preliminary bath just as the others did. It was while he was taking one of these baths that the idea which resulted in Kono Hito's "komaru" had occurred to Sono San. This is the idea.

Sono's rice-fields reached quite up to the temple grove. He would build a shrine in honour of the temple's god a little this side of the gate of the temple, and near the road. He would sink a well there. It would needs be a deep well, it is true, but Sono's crops had been good and he would not begrudge the cost. Having dug the well he would place a tablet before the shrine, bearing a declaration of the dedication of his offering to the temple's god on behalf of those who worshipped there. He would give each worshipper all the pure water he might desire for a bath, and would not charge him for it. All the worshipper need do would be to pump and help himself! It was a grand scheme, such as only a man who had seen the world could have evolved. Sono had been a traveller.

He knew "Yokohama, Nagasaki, Hakodate, hai," personally, for he had been there. He had seen missionaries in Tokio and merchants in the treaty ports. To one of the missionaries he owed his inspiration. The reverend gentleman had shown him a praying water-wheel from India. It was part of a collection the learned preacher had gathered at various stations he had occupied in the Far East. Sono San delighted in the collection, but the praying-wheel pleased him most. If he had had a place on his west coast rice-fields to set one up he would have begged the missionary to get him one from the ancient home of Buddhism.

Some days after he had seen this supplication-made-simple apparatus, so much simpler than the man-power prayer-wheels of the Tokio temples,

Sono received an invitation from one of the missionary's friends, a silk merchant in Yokohama. This man wished to make acquaintances on the west coast, especially in Fukui and Kanagawa Kens, where the silkworms spin well. Sono, always ready "to see the new thing," to learn something and to have a good time, took the train at Shimbashi station that afternoon, and within an hour was at "Yama Namban," as the jin-riki-sha coolies called the merchant's house.

Sono Hito had a wonderful time at this foreigner's home. The yoshoku, the setsu-in, the nedai, and the danru, with its kemuridashi, were marvellous to him, but the thing that tickled him especially was what he called the "midzu-age kikai," or water-raising machine, not far from the kitchen door. He played with this a half-hour steadily, until he was all of a sweat and had flooded his host's back yard and turned the tennis-court into a soppy marsh.

Nothing would do but he must have one to operate at his home over on the west coast, and as the kikai was not in stock at any of the Yokohama agencies, Sono Hito's host promised to get one for him from San Francisco.

"I'll send it over to you as soon as it arrives," said Mo-Hitotsu-Smith San. (M. H. S. S. was the second Smith to come to Yokohama after Perry's departure. The first Smith was merely "Smith San," but the second was Mo-Hitotsu-Smith San, *i.e.* more-one-Smith Mr.) He did better than that, however, he took the apparatus over himself three

months later, and showed his Japanese friend how to set it up and how he could use it to fill a storage tank so as to have water for emergencies.

So Sono Hito had men dig the well wide and deep. There was not such another well in that part of the country. Kono Hito, across the road, had nothing in the least comparable. He would not have spent so much money on a well had he been never so rich, and in these days he thought himself a very poor man indeed. It grieved him to think that anything that cost money should be necessary in his household. The sight of his people eating made him ill, and the prosperity across the road was like fire against his face. He could not endure to look at it. But as Kono Hito suffered, Sono Hito worked at his well shrine. The building was beautiful in design as anything pertaining to Hongwanji would be. Inside, over at one end, was a broad, shallow, wooden tank for the bather to sit in, and, before the tank, ample floor space, where the worshipper would have room to use his tenugui or scrubbing towel, such as all Japanese carry with them. At the end opposite the tank was the shrine, and beside the tank was a device strange to the natives of the west coast. Sono called it a prayer-machine. Over it was a gaku bearing the Chinese inscription, "Bonno kuno" ("All lust is grief").

An Englishman would not have thought of prayer in connection with this device. He would doubt if the Japanese used water prayer-wheels, and would have said simply "chain-pump." But one may

assert with considerable confidence that Englishman or other foreigner never before had seen a chain-pump boxed in an image of Buddha, with a third arm, in the shape of a crank, reaching out from one side and projecting over a bath-tub.

Sono Hito, however, knew all about the apparatus, both from the Yankee and the west coast view-point. He was the only person who did; but, like Brer Rabbit, "he wasn't saying nuffin."

In fact, the two foreigners who did see this device guessed right the very first time, like the young man in the song, but they kept their thoughts to themselves. Sono Hito might call it a prayer-machine, and each bather as he sat in the tub might turn Buddha's third arm with vigour and pray fervently, chanting his petitions in unison with the rat-tat-rat-tat-tattle in Buddha's stomach; to the Yankee's mind the thing would be a chain-pump still.

It was soon after this visit of Mo-Hitotsu-Smith San that the patriarch of the Home of Happy Husbandmen had conceived his scheme of joining piety and prosperity in happy combination by giving faithful Buddhists a cataract bath free and a chance at the prayer-machine thrown in. He had to explain his device, of course, for it was such a noticeable innovation, so he told the village folk that the ancient peoples of China and India had used these machines with august results. He even threw off his kimono, sat himself in the tub and showed them how, after pious revolutions, the Divine Pleasure would give them water from above.

The idea pleased everyone unless it were Kono Hito, for Buddhists are partial to cataract baths. They take them the year round, even in winter, though possibly they do not enjoy them then, at least not with obvious hilarity. In Tokio, the capital, in spite of its modernisation, the traveller sees native men and women standing naked under a fall of water in some of the temple parks. In December and January this water is well down to freezing point. The Japanese do this because they know there is virtue in a cataract. Wherever one is, that place is sacred. If there is none they often take great pains to make artificial falls, especially in the neighbourhood of temples.

They are purifiers beyond all else, these "from-heaven-descending" streams. Therefore, when Sono San made his offer of a free bath—a cataract bath! something the region about the beloved temple had not known since the "O jishin" (the great earthquake), which, hundreds of years before, had broken up the country, letting out the upper waters and ruining their plans of holy ablution—he became the most popular man in the ken.

Sono Hito was deeply grateful to his foreign friend, who had showed him how to rig the pump so as to deliver the water into a tank in the roof of the shrine. This tank was a distributing reservoir. Part of the water that the worshippers pumped into it poured down in a stream on to the head of whoever might be working at the crank, as he or she sat in the tub. The greater part, however, flowed away into channels through the rice-fields. As the

pious came, therefore, and worked the prayer-machine, they accomplished three things at once which, in the order of Sono San's idea of their importance, would read—pumping, irrigation, and purification. This explains how Sono Hito kept things green, and why Kono Hito said "Komaru."

Poor Kono Hito worried greatly over the early yellowishness of his fields. He did not understand how Sono Hito managed. He never had been to Yokohama, and he knew nothing of chain-pumps. He believed that Sono Hito's piety had won favour in Buddha's eyes, and that the gods had blessed the fields as a mark of divine pleasure. If he could have a bath shrine he might win favour too, but that would cost money; and then to give the baths free, not to charge even a one-rin[1] piece for them—the thought was too painful.

Still, if Buddha would smile on him, it might pay, thought Kono. It would pay—but to spend the money. "Domo! Komaru ne!" So he devised how he might be pious cheaply.

"Namm Omahen de gisu," said the wife in the dialect of her district when a man called one morning to see Kono Hito. She meant he was not at home (in Tokio she might have said: "Tadaima rusu de gozaimasu." That would have conveyed a similar idea). So the man went away.

Down the road he heard a voice calling "Korario," which to those who live in that region means, "Come here." The man went in the direction of the call, and found Kono Hito busy with a carpenter and

[1] One rin equals one-tenth of a farthing.

well-digger, discussing plans for an opposition bath shrine. Kono Hito was in agony over the cost, but the workmen had reached their lowest limit, and, with many bows, were protesting that if they cut their price down even a "mo" further they would not have enough left to pay for the air they breathed while digging. So Kono had to give in.

Within a week the plans had materialised. There was a well with a pair of buckets, a tub, and a shrine dedicated to the use of worshippers. It was not a cataract bath, nor was the well deep, but Kono Hito hoped Buddha would take his poverty into account and smile as sweetly as though the water fell direct from a spring on the mountain side.

But Buddha did not smile. No one went to Kono Hito's shrine bath unless too many had gathered at the place across the way. "Without worshippers Buddha will not smile," said the unhappy husbandman. "Komaru ne!" And later he said to himself, "Do shimasho ka." This brought him inspiration.

He took a station at a point that commanded a view of the road, and whenever he saw those coming who might be worshippers he went into Sono Hito's shrine, sat himself in the tank, turned the crank, and prayed vigorously.

This was a cunning scheme, for the pilgrims, after waiting long for Kono to finish, would decide that such fervent piety should not be disturbed, and, leaving the zealot in Sono Hito's tub, they would cross over to do as best they might with the two buckets. When they had mundificated they emptied

these buckets on the roadside. But still Buddha did not smile on the fields of Kono San.

Kono San, however, as he ground and ground away, taking twenty or thirty baths a day, chilling himself in the cataract, and pumping three times as much water over Sono Hito's fields as he brought down on to his aching poll, had much tenacity, and a belief that if he could keep the pious to his side of the road long enough he would receive the blessings his soul yearned for.

He pumped and prayed heroically, resting little and eating less, while Sono Hito took a peep at him occasionally, and showed not the least vexation.

Kono San wondered at this, for he had been rather fearful of discovery, and when he learned that the man he was so jealous of had seen him and had said nothing, he did not understand; nor could he understand why Buddha did not show some sign of favour. As he pumped, he puzzled upon these things, and grew more and more attenuated. Overbathing, even with prayers, is not good.

When Junsa, the policeman, called Isha, the physician, to Sono Hito's shrine one evening, and let his lantern light fall on Kono Hito's face, the man of medicine said, "Water on the brain." Two days later they buried him, and Sono Hito gave money for a stone column to mark the resting-place of the dead man's ashes. Why not? Kono Hito really had helped Sono Hito a good deal.

CHAPTER II

O TOYO SAN

SONO HITO took us over one day to visit his friends at Tatsumi, an interesting old place, where we had a practical demonstration of the irresistibility of Japanese hospitality. We had intended to spend only an afternoon, but our intentions might as well have been non-existent for all that they availed. A wooden image would have succumbed, and neither of us was an image, though, in the light of the native graciousness, we appeared to ourselves wooden enough. So it was that that afternoon visit, under Tatsumi manipulation, expanded into days, and the days into weeks.

We were the only foreigners the villagers had ever seen, and though it was in the days of passports, the police did not ask us to produce our papers. They had never had occasion to look up the law about "barbarians." Tatsumi had given us a chance indeed to see Japan at home. There we were near enough to native life to hear the heart beat. We did not see much of the owner, Hikusaburo, as he was away much, but his father and his mother we came to know well, and also his children,

O TOYO SAN'S HOME

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his doll wife, and last, but far from least, the sweet lady who had preceded her. O Toyo was her name. Once, in Hikusaburo's absence, we paid a three days' visit to her home, a charming place, and again we saw her close to Tatsumi—but not inside.

I recall her now, as she sat tapping the ashes from her silver pipe in one of the small thatched houses that stand just outside the blackened walls of that old homestead. She was waiting for her kurumaya, who had dropped the shafts of his jinriki-sha and was taking a bowl of rice with some old friends at the gate where he had served for so many years. O Toyo San was on her way to Biwa, and farther south, and had stopped at the cottage that she might see her children.

There was a longing in her eyes as she sat half kneeling on the little square mat by the brazier, now arranging the bits of charcoal with her tongs, and now taking a bit of tobacco from the pouch beside her on the matting. Her face was gentle and sweet to look upon. When she smiled her eyes sparkled, and her parting lips discovered pearly teeth that had never needed a dentist's care. But her smile was hardly more than courtesy, despite its gentle look, for there was a yearning in her heart that a woman of another race would hardly have concealed.

She is a mother, but her children are growing up almost as strangers to her. It is not her fault at all. Her parents had arranged her marriage when she was hardly in her teens, without asking her whether

she would or not. Obedience was the only law she knew, and with filial piety (why is there not a good Old English equivalent for this term?) she had done her parents' bidding, not questioning their choice. Her lot had been that of many another native woman.

O Toyo San must wait outside to see the children born to her in Tatsumi, a girl and a boy. The boy, O Bo Chan, as the house-folk call him, is heir to the ancient manor. The master of Tatsumi is lord of all the region round. He has owned Hombo, the village extending northward, ever since men first abode there, and the checker-board of rice-fields reaching far out towards the boundaries of Niu Gun, one of the richest counties in the famous province of Echizen.

Those, however, who have long known Tatsumi and the lord thereof doubt if much but the name of these great possessions will be left by the time O Bo Chan has come to man's estate. Bo's grandfather has been "inkiyo" many years. Before he retired from active life to devote himself to study and meditation he had lived like a prince, but well within his income. When he handed over his estates to his son, Hikusaburo, he had accompanied the transfer with much good advice, which the heir had acknowledged dutifully, saying, "Kashikomarimashita" ("I listen with respectful assent"), and "Sayo de gozaimasu" ("Honourably so augustly is") frequently.

But Tatsumi's friends said "Neko ni koban" ("Gold coins to a cat") when they spoke among themselves, though in public they held their peace.

Since then their prophecy has been fulfilling rapidly, but the inkiyo has not paid heed. His cares for this life are over, and his days are sweet and peaceful. O Kamisan, his honoured wife, has seen, but she cannot speak. Indeed she is O Kamisan no longer, only Obasan (grandmother). Her son has become the head of the house, and her duty, as a woman's duty ever is in Japan, is to obey, not to criticise. So Hikusaburo has had free way. Never does anyone say no to him.

His father had given to him O Toyo San before he was done with school. She was the daughter of a rich relation, a saké brewer. The marriage, as is usual in Japan, was purely a family agreement, without civil or religious ceremony, and of course both houses were happy over the event.

When the bride arrived at the home of her new parents, dressed in silken robes, and her face painted white as chalk, the place was thronged with guests. Tatsumi had thrown wide its gates, and there was feasting for a week. Oji San had dispensed clam broth and mushrooms lavishly, and there was joy throughout the whole of Echizen.

Later, when a boy was born, the old walls once more overflowed with joyousness. Oji San smiled at his grandchild, and seeing that it was a healthy babe, put his affairs in order and became inkiyo.[1] Hikusaburo aided him in this, for he was eager to take control. He accepted everything with due humility, even to the patriarchal blessing and advice.

[1] Retired from the management of affairs.

Then he began the life he had longed to lead. His home saw little of him, except when he came in with a band of geisha and made merry till the sun rose. Wherever he went the samisen began to twang, and the moon-fiddle, the koto, and the drum, to fill the air with sounds.

One day Hikusaburo, who was now the father of two children, fell in love. He had been in love before often enough for a day or two; but this time the feeling clung to him, and hurt. Of course she was a geisha, for that was the only sort of woman Hikusaburo had paid attention to since he became lord of Tatsumi. He bought her release from the master who had trained her, and took her home, along with a dozen other of her sisters in the art of spending money. He feared lest she might be lonely.

Tatsumi saw wilder times than ever it had known before. Saké was as plentiful as the rain in June. Hombo hardly recognised itself. O Toyo San, Hikusaburo's wife, only was unhappy. To see herself, the mother of two children, supplanted by a doll not yet fourteen years old, was too much even for her self-abnegation. The cheerfulness which the native code commands to woman was not in evidence in her countenance. Hikusaburo spoke harshly, but she would not brighten up. Then he sent her home. She has not been within the walls of Tatsumi since. She would not enter though not even a ghost were about the place.

So it was when last I saw her that she sat outside waiting while the melancholy music of the samisen

floated out from the zashiki, where once she was mistress, and where now my lord made merry with his doll.

The kurumaya said that possibly when my lord was drunk she might see her children.

CHAPTER III

OUR LANDLORD

IT was at Tatsumi that we met Okashi Kintaro, who subsequently became our landlord. He was down from the north on a visit to some friends with whom he had served in his fighting days. We saw him several times, and so enjoyed the enthusiasm he displayed at various feastings, to which we had the good luck to receive invitations, that we besought him to let us go along with him a way on his return.

"Too happy," he assured us. Such an honour he would not have dared to hope for. And so with mutual satisfaction we started on the journey up the coast.

He was a triumph as a guide, for he knew all the interesting folk along the route, and presented us to the "choja" or headman, of each village we passed through. Literally we had to eat our way. On the last day, which was the hardest, we had nine banquets. We were in Okashi's native country by this time, and, as we learned later, he had advertised our coming with a showman's zeal. Such schools as were in session closed, and the villagers