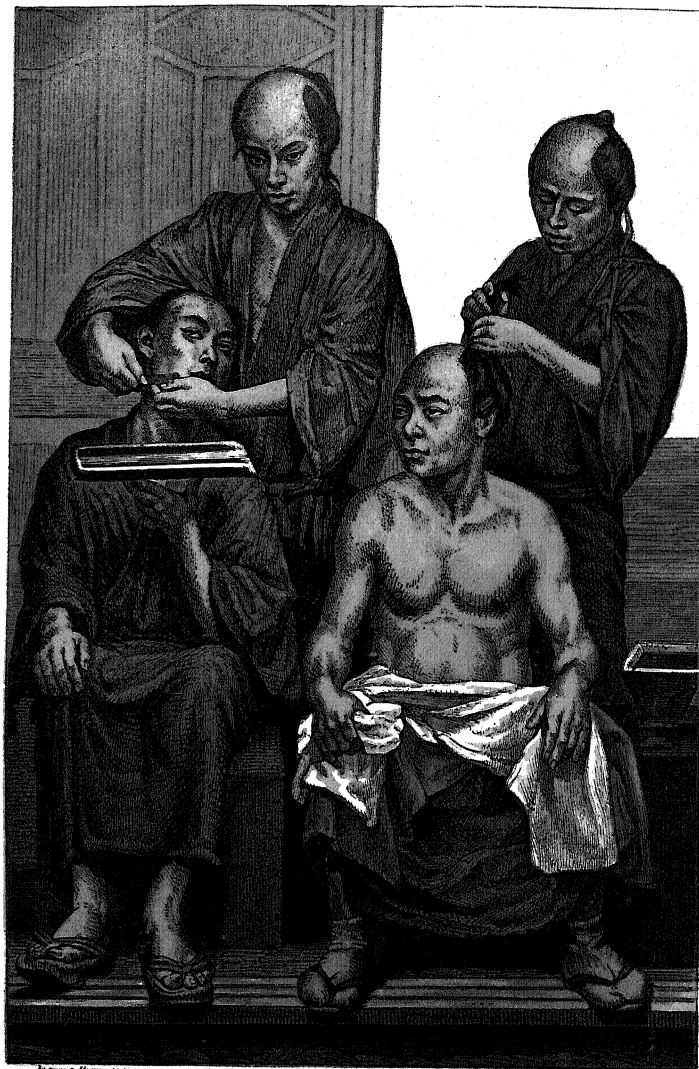


# Japan, Historical and Descriptive



*Marcus & Co.*

A BARBER'S SHOP.—p. 151.

# JAPAN

## HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE

REVISED AND ENLARGED

FROM "LES VOYAGES CÉLÈBRES"

BY

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"THE TWIN BROTHERS OF ELFVEDALE," &c.

*Numerous Illustrations and a Map*



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## P R E F A C E.

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THE present work is a brief, but, we believe, complete and comprehensive account of Japanese life, character, and manners. It contains within a short compass what could otherwise only be discovered by an extensive perusal of large and expensive works, which contain a multitude of personal details and extraneous matters, uninteresting and unnecessary to the reader who seeks either for information or amusement. A history of Japan, as it has been and now is, forms, indeed, in itself a study as curious as anything to be found in the whole range of romance. A kingdom which for ages successfully resisted the intrusion of foreigners, and, surrounded on all sides by the dividing ocean, worked out within its own borders a complete and peculiar civilisation, is surely a remarkable phenomenon in human history. Leaving out of view the abortive attempts made in earlier times by the Portuguese and the Dutch to effect a settlement in the country, it may be stated that it is only within our own times that this spell of national privacy has been broken. The nations of the West, who had overrun the globe in search of "fresh woods and pastures new" for commerce, began to knock loudly at the doors of this antiquated prison, until the summons could no longer be disregarded. Japan was virtually thrown open to the trading communities of the world, and it need hardly be added that the British were the first pioneers who established and have since maintained a solid and influential position in the country.

Very singular must have been the experiences of our countrymen who first became acquainted with the social and political life of the people. They beheld many things which must have

carried them back in memory to the early days of English history. A system of feudalism, more despotic than William the Conqueror ever contemplated, held in chains the entire country, and crushed out all notion of personal freedom. But no sooner did foreigners obtain a footing in the island than, as if by magic, this anomalous state of things began to vanish away. The people began to see that to real civilisation they were still strangers. From obstinate exclusivism they soon passed to extravagant admiration of everything foreign, and soon an *Anglo-mania* set in, which held that all things worthy of being worshipped and imitated had their home in Britain. The facility with which the Japanese have abandoned their old ideas, and taken to copying English ways and adopting English inventions, is at once ludicrous and extraordinary. So far has this been carried that artists are already beginning to lament the utter decay of everything distinctively national and peculiar in their productions. Whether the Japanese will continue faithful to their new life remains to be seen. At present the British are being carefully copied in every particular, from ships of war down to neckties and tall hats. This is surely a stimulating flattery to our national pride, for the Japanese have also had the opportunity of becoming acquainted with Americans and Russians, French and Germans. In reforming their institutions it must be admitted, however, that they have shown much discrimination, having selected some distinguished German scholars, for example, to take charge of their Department of Public Instruction.

So long as "the proper study of mankind is man," books which tell us of the ways and doings of fellow-beings very dissimilar to ourselves must continue to be the most permanently interesting of all books. Especially is this true in the case of the Japanese, who form in so many ways a complete anomaly in civilisation. The reader of the following pages will find that they embrace a great variety of topics, from the life of the Mikado on his sacred throne to that of the peasant in his winter coat of straw. Popular tales and legends have been interwoven with the general account in order to render the book more attractive, and at the same time to exhibit the people in all phases of their character. We believe we present here, in the briefest space possible, the most complete account that has yet appeared of *Japan, Historical and Descriptive*.