

# Royal British Nurses' Association.

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## A HOLIDAY LETTER.

### JAPAN TRANSPORTED.

We had heard of a gem from an Eastern landscape that lay among rough furze-covered slopes in the Ocols and so, for a glimpse of Japan, we sped by motor car along the Eastern stretches of the hills, past many a tiny hamlet, past banks of bracken and heather with many a glimpse of "the clear winding Devon" threading its way about fields of yellow corn and green turnip crop in no way suggestive of a local psychology which would seek to place alongside them anything so unproductive of practical and tangible results as a Japanese garden. But the tragedy of the loss of a possible few acres of good turnip crop through Japan's having captured the imagination of the owner of Cowden Castle did not weigh heavily upon our spirits when we reached the Mecca of the afternoon's pilgrimage. For before us lay quaint thatched roofs over queer erections of wood, pagoda-like arches of sunny Japan, turreted summer houses with English roses climbing shyly about them and many an odd planked bridge and pier stretching out into a broad lake, introduced into the landscape by the simple expedient of damming up a narrow mountain burn. By a grassy path, surmounting the sloping banks of the lake, we reached the opposite side where one can enjoy what is perhaps the most beautiful view of the garden and feel in sympathy with the legend, set out in curious characters over an archway of roses, naming this part of the garden "A Place of Pleasure and Delight." For, with intuitive knowledge of her art, the Japanese lady who laid out the garden so selected the position of the lake that the whole slope of the garden lies mirrored in a sort of shining panorama of colour. Clumps of white and purple heather and the pale greens of the bank shine up in delicate, glittering reflection, creeping masses of "star of Bethlehem" light up the water here; and there a mass of elder, slowly changing to the tints of the autumn, makes a splash of yellow against dark reflections of pine and fir. The leaves of the mahonia too are changing to bright reds and, with the purple berries clustered about them, make a rich contrast, in the water, with the shadow thrown by a rough boulder or quaint and ancient Japanese lantern cut in granite. Rippling masses of red, caught from the rambler roses high on the bank, keep tune with the waving greens and browns of the

bulrushes for, in this garden, there is no disharmony though roses do keep company with bulrushes and summer houses with ridiculous roofs obtrude themselves upon a northern common sense which holds fast to the necessity for strong walls surmounted by proper and geometrically planned roofs.

And the wild bees and the birds have come to take a part in the making of the garden; the hum and the twitter of their song rises softly above the sound of rippling water and the gentle rustle of the leaves in the wind of a summer afternoon. Now and then a waterhen shoots across the lake's surface making, as she goes, the curious arrowhead-like ripple on the water which is characteristic of her "progress."

Near the end of the lake we reach a red patch of sand with curious trees about it, just such a patch of colour as the Japanese love to introduce into their gardens; it has fringes of green and you cross it on a double row of stepping stones and come to a pathway no longer of these but of large smooth flags laid one by another with rock flowers creeping up on each side and between the margins of the stones. The Torii, an arch of wood painted a bright red, stands on the bank beyond and indicates why special care has been bestowed on this pathway, why the little rock plants were planted about it. For a Torii always indicates the proximity of a shrine and, sure enough, on passing under the Torii into the thickness of shrubs and trees beyond it we find ourselves before a Shinto shrine. Beneath its arch are two trellised doors and—shades of the Covenanters and good kirk-going folk sleeping your last sleep on the hillsides near by—on opening the doors we find a group of heathen images comfortably sheltered therein. On the wall behind them hangs a mirror, symbol of the Shinto religion. In the reading of this symbol lies the sum of the Shinto creed—"Know Thyself," a mandate which appears in almost every religion and every philosophy and which embodies the compass of another ancient religious symbol—the triangle typifying God, Man and the Universe. The Shrine stands at the apex of the triangle of the garden and from this "holy of holies" there rays out the beauty of tree and lake and soft sloping bank. Thus in a garden we contact the religious feeling of a pre-Christian age striving to interpret the writings of the gods in cloud and river, in tree and grass and flower.

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