LAURENTIA: A TALE OF JAPAN

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Laurentia: A Tale of Japan by Lady Georgiana Fullerton

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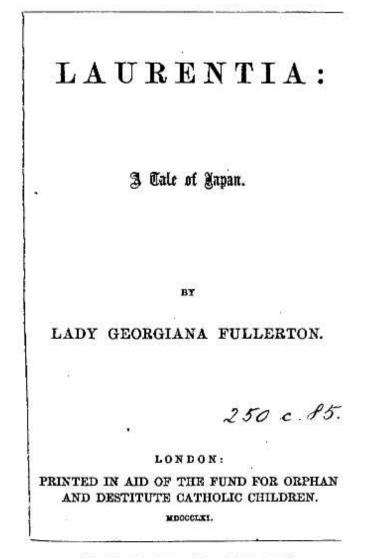
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LADY GEORGIANA FULLERTON

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Trieste



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22

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CONTENTS.

CHAPTE								PAGE	
ı.	THE ABTIST'S	HOME	84	1993	*	1	0.00	1	
11.	STRUGGLE AN	D VICT	OBY .	885	$\mathbf{\hat{v}}$	8	•	18	
ш.	GRACE UCOND	око .	: 3 1	(1 97)	\dot{z}	8	3:03	40	
IV.	A VISIT TO T	HE PAL	ACE	(1)	 i 	4	•	60	
v.	THE EVE OF T	HE FEE	TIVAL	63	<u>.</u> :		3 8	88	
VI.	THE JAPANESS	BRIDI	15.	(G))	()	٠	•	105	
VII.	A CONVERSION	г.		8 9 83	3 3	18		124	
VIII.	A BAPTISM	(a) - 2	32	1	2			150	
1X.	PERSECUTION			3 8 5	•	÷		166	
x.	PREPARATION	•			2		٠	180	
xı.	MISGIVINGS			305		ŝ.	S	196	
X11.	THE TWO MA	THIASP	з.				•	211	
XIII .	MARTYBOOM						80.0	228	
APPER	idix .	8 8		۲	٠		٠	245	
			£1						
		- 52	- t (s.	20					28
		5	2	23					

2.5

€)

PREFACE.

THE incidents embodied in the following little tale, though for the most part founded on fact, are not related with strict regard to historical accuracy, or to the chronological order in which they took place. It has been attempted to give a picture of the Church of Japan in the sixteenth century, and to illustrate in the shape of a narrative the peculiar character of the Japanese converts to Christianity, rather than to compose a regular historical tale. But it may be safely asserted that not one trait of heroism, not one act of selfsacrifice, not one sentiment of exalted virtue from the lips of priest or catechumen, woman or child, which finds place in these pages, but has its counterpart in the annals of a Church founded by a saint, fruitful in the most remarkable virtues, and which, after a hundred years' duration, did not die away from the decline of faith or the lukewarmness of its members, but was suddenly extinguished as it were in a sea of blood, leaving behind it glorious records of its existence, but not one priest to carry on the service of religion, and but very few Christians to perpetuate its memory.

The character of the Japanese race is marked by

PREFACE.

peculiar features, which probably told on the destinies of the Church in a country which its historian, Father Charlevoix, calls the England of Asia. There was a strength of will, an independence of spirit, a dogged attachment to existing institutions in that people which has no parallel amongst the nations The resistance of the unbelieving porof the East. tion of its inhabitants to the establishment of the Christian religion was as desperate as the efforts of the converts for its propagation were strenuous. The heroic courage of the Japanese Christians, their readiness, or rather eagerness, to renounce their worldly possessions, to suffer torments and death itself for the sake of their religion; the audacity with which they braved the anger of their heathen Sovereigns, and with which even young children asserted their faith in the face of their alarmed and indignant parents, are in some degree traceable to the influence of natural character, and hardly perhaps as strong evidences of the power of Christianity over their souls as the generosity with which they embraced the less dazzling virtues of obedience, humility, and evangelical poverty, singularly opposed as they were to their previous habits, feelings, and tone of mind.

The Jesuit fathers were often obliged to restrain their impetuosity, and check their ardor for martyrdom, by representing to them that, although the sacrifice of their lives was no doubt in one sense a gain to themselves, at the same time

vi

PREFACE.

they were not justified in endangering the safety and the very existence of the Church in their native land by too rash an onslaught on the prejudices of their countrymen. Through a long period of years they had succeeded in guiding the destinies of that Church through the many perils which had It had been often persecuted, often beset it. driven from one province to another; some of its converts martyred, and others banished; but it had still maintained its ground and a firm hold on the hearts of its children. But at the period in which the scene of this little story is laid many circumstances were combining to precipitate the course of events which finally led to the massacre of the Christians and the apparently total annihilation of Christianity in Japan. The impetuous character of the Japanese converts, the jealous susceptibilities of their rulers; the vainglorious boastings of a Spanish naval officer, reported in an evil hour to a proud and irritable monarch; the national feeling roused to alarm by the dread of foreign domination-all these causes together were sowing seeds of destruction in as fair a field as had ever been cultivated by evangelical labourers or watered by the blood of pious martyrs. But may we not indulge the hope that in that extraordinary country, which for two hundred years has refused admission to Europeans, and excluded from its shores her travellers. her traders, and her priests, traces may yet remain of the true religion which had taken such deep root

vii