

LAURENTIA: A TALE OF JAPAN

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Laurentia: A Tale of Japan by Lady Georgiana Fullerton

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LADY GEORGIANA FULLERTON

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A Tale of Japan.

BY

LADY GEORGIANA FULLERTON.

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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE ARTIST'S HOME	1
II. STRUGGLE AND VICTORY	18
III. GRACE UCONDONO	40
IV. A VISIT TO THE PALACE	60
V. THE EVE OF THE FESTIVAL	88
VI. THE JAPANESE BRIDES	105
VII. A CONVERSION	124
VIII. A BAPTISM	150
IX. PERSECUTION	166
X. PREPARATION	180
XI. MISGIVINGS	196
XII. THE TWO MATTHIAES	211
XIII. MARTYRDOM	228
APPENDIX	245

1870

1871

1872

1873

1874

1875

1876

1877

1878

1879

1880

1881

1882

1883

1884

1885

1886

1887

1888

1889

1890

1891

1892

1893

1894

1895

1896

1897

1898

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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 self-sacrifice, 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

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 of the East. The resistance of the unbelieving portion 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

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 beset it. It had been often persecuted, often 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
