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# APPOINTMENT IN JAPAN

Memories of sixty years

G. C. Allen



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# **APPOINTMENT IN JAPAN**

**Memories of sixty years**

一英国人教師の見た日本  
回顧六十年

G. C. アレン



George Allen, on his arrival in Nagoya, 1922

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IN PRIVATE LIFE, COURTEOUS, IN PUBLIC LIFE, DILIGENT,  
IN RELATIONSHIPS, LOYAL.

*The Analects of Confucius*  
in the translation by A. Waley

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## Publisher's Note

We are fortunate that Professor Allen completed his revision of the manuscript shortly before his death.

We have to thank his executors for their help in obtaining the manuscript, in particular Professor Margaret Gowing of the University of Oxford, who ensured that all the papers were made available. Thanks are also due to Nagoya University, The Japan Foundation and Mr Isamu Takashima for assistance in locating photographs.

We have also to acknowledge the help of Professor Allen's friends in the Kitankai (the alumni association of Nagoya University), in particular the assistance of Mr Isamu Takashima and Mr S. Takayama, whose support made possible the publication of this book.

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## Illustrations

*frontispiece*

George Allen, 1922

*between pages 118–9*

George Allen, 1979

Welcome party for George Allen, Tokyo, 1979

Welcome party for George Allen, Nagoya, 1979

The Japan Foundation Award Ceremony, 1980



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# I

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## Arrival at the City of Fame and Antiquity

In the early years of the present century, W. J. Ashley, whose reputation until then had been based on his distinction as Mediaeval Economic Historian, set out on his career as a pioneer of higher business education in Britain. For the next twenty-five years he presided over the Faculty of Commerce at the University of Birmingham. It is symptomatic of national attitudes towards innovation that, while British firms regarded the venture with coolness, if not suspicion, the Mitsui family of Japan, which for centuries had been prominent in Japanese commerce and finance, should send one of its members to become an early pupil. The Japanese at that time were no strangers to higher business education. The precursor of what was afterwards the Tokyo University of Commerce (Shodai) and today is Hitotsubashi University, was founded in the 1870s. As always, they were eager to discover what others had to teach them.

The connection with Birmingham, once established, persisted. From the 1900s on the Japanese government founded a number of *Koto Shogyo Gakko* (Commercial High Schools), modelled on the German Handelshochschulen, and each of the schools recruited several foreigners to their staff. On frequent occasions, when they wanted an English lecturer, the authorities asked Ashley to recommend candidates for the post, and several Birmingham men were chosen during the next twenty-five years to fill these

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vacancies. In the spring of 1922, Ashley was asked to recommend someone for a lectureship at a *Koto Shogyo Gakko* that had been opened at Nagoya, in Central Japan, during the previous year. Ashley was then tutoring me in my post-graduate year at Birmingham, and he asked me if I would like the job, a two-year appointment. I was somewhat taken aback by his suggestion, since I had other plans in mind. But he strongly urged me to allow my name to be put forward as a candidate. "You will have a splendid opportunity of seeing the world at other people's expense and the privilege of living for some years in a civilisation very different from our own." It did not take long to decide, and I remember that the confirmation of the appointment was brought to me in June 1922, just as I was about to enter the University Hall for an examination. By this time I was eagerly looking forward to the adventure, and so the news did not put me off my stride. I was then almost twenty-two years of age.

Less than two months later I found myself on board the *Suwa Maru*, a 10,000 ton passenger-cargo liner of the Nippon Yusen Kaisha fleet. For seven weeks I revelled in the sights, sounds and smells of the ports – Marseilles, Port Said, Aden, Bombay, Colombo, Singapore, Hong Kong and Shanghai – before arriving at Kobe in the middle of September. The passengers on the ship were as varied in nationality as in calling – British, American, German, Dutch, Swiss, Scandinavian, Chinese and, of course, Japanese. Many of them were old China hands on the way back to Shanghai to resume their business activities. Others were officially returning from leave and there were the few academics. I enjoyed the stimulating company. The old China hands were intent on instructing me, or disillusioning me, about the ways of the East, and a pleasantly satirical Chinese pulled my leg about the part I was going to play in sustaining the White Man's Burden! The Japanese held themselves rather aloof from the rest of the company, although I found that they had not been slow in speculating among themselves about the status and charac-

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ter of the various Westerners. When they heard that I was going to teach in Japan, some of them took me in hand and tried to explain to me the things in their country that I was likely to consider strange. So far as I was concerned, I hinted, the stranger the better. I was amused when a kindly academic, who evidently assumed that I was probably equipped with all the prejudices of the typical Englishman in foreign parts, went out of his way to convince me, as we sailed from port to port, of the common humanity of the Indian peddler, the Malay docker, the Chinese rickshaw coolie and the English schoolmaster. The most distinguished scholar on board was Professor Inouye, an elderly philosopher. One day I was admitted to his presence and honoured by an introduction to him. After initial courtesies he announced, to my discomfiture: "I am a Hegelian philosopher." I fear that he was disappointed in me for I could not then declare, nor could I have subsequently declared, a commitment to any system of philosophic principles.

These shipboard excitements at last came to an end one morning in the middle of September when I disembarked at Kobe, eager for new experiences. By the afternoon of that day I found myself travelling by train to Nagoya where I was to make my home. The weather was warm and an unfamiliar landscape unfolded before me in the sunshine. Through the carriage window I looked out on terraced rice fields and tea plantations. Rising steeply in the background were forest-clad hills. Here and there, on slight eminences above the cultivated plain, half-hidden in clusters of pine trees, were temples and shrines. In the fields men and women, dressed in white and blue costumes of unfamiliar style, with their heads protected by wide straw hats, were harvesting, or trudging along narrow tracks beside small heavily-laden carts pulled by oxen, horses or straining dogs. When the train passed through towns and villages I caught brief glimpses of streets, or groups of unpainted wooden houses, roofed with heavy blue-grey tiles or deep thatch. Occasionally a modern factory, built incongruously

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of concrete, came into view, the only type of building in the landscape that recalled the Western world. The advertisements displayed along some stretches of the line were fascinating. Since I could not read the characters in which they were written, I remained ignorant of their banality.

The excitement roused by the strange scene was no less than that I felt when I turned my eyes on the interior of the railway carriage. It was a single compartment with a long, blue, velvet-covered seat on each side. Most of the passengers had either removed their outer garments altogether or had drawn them about their knees and were sitting at ease on their heels, leaving their footgear on the floor in front of them. From time to time they fanned themselves, opening their dress to give access to the cooling air. Using towels, a few had tied small blocks of ice to the top of their heads, a form of refrigeration which obviously enabled them to endure the heat of the afternoon without discomfort. In the luggage racks were bundles of varying size held together by squares of cloth tied at the corners. These, as I was soon to find out, were called *furoshiki*, a most convenient and flexible means of carrying one's possessions. Only a small minority of the men were dressed in Western style, even if those who had removed their coats and trousers were included. All the women were dressed in *kimono*. I was an intruder from another world.

Whenever the train halted at a station, through the windows vendors handed earthenware tea-pots containing green tea, and handleless cups, or neat wooden boxes containing cold rice and pickles, or little string bags of fruit. A few children, more gaily dressed than their elders, ran uninhibitedly up and down the carriage. Some of them stopped and stared at me, but fled in terror if I seemed to take notice of them. When they did so their parents smiled and gave me friendly nods in order to dispel any embarrassment that this might cause me.

It was a doubly distracting journey. I was reluctant to miss any scene in the passing countryside, but once my eyes had turned to the charms of the carriage it was an effort to

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withdraw them. The conversation of the passengers flowed over me, ceaseless and uncomprehended, yet I was content to think that, later on, these sounds might perhaps convey something to me.

In the late afternoon the conductor appeared at the door of the carriage, doffed his peaked cap, bowed and informed us that we were approaching Nagoya station. He appealed to us politely not to leave anything behind. Of course, I could not understand what he said at the time; but I found afterwards that he was making the conventional speech on the approach to a station. This is almost the only feature of a Japanese railway journey that has remained unchanged during the last sixty years. Nowadays the passengers are provided with pullman seats and the carriages on the main line trains are air-conditioned. Most passengers wear Western-style suits and dresses and their picturesque and informal travelling habits have been discarded. The landscape as seen from the main Tokaido line is no longer one of terraced rice fields and thatched farmhouses. Although these remain, they are being submerged by a swelling wave of factories, tall blocks of flats and offices, concrete elevated roads and new tracks and bridges for the high-speed trains. Farming has become highly mechanised and the fields are sparsely peopled.

My recollection of the actual arrival is vague. I recall a confused group of railway officials and colleagues-to-be all trying to help me to gather my luggage and set me on my way to a hotel. There were then no taxis in Nagoya. My luggage travelled in a handcart and I myself was installed in a rickshaw. Before setting off I was guilty of the first of my long series of social solecisms. I tried to tip a helpful policeman under the impression that he was a railway official. My offering was brushed aside. This mistake was my first introduction to two important features of Japanese society. One was that Japan was one country in the world where tips were not only not expected but were actually refused. The other was that the police of that period, though inclined to be busy-bodies and sometimes overbear-