

THE IMPERIAL FAMILY OF JAPAN

BY LAURA B. STARR.



HE present Emperor and Empress of Dai Nipon are, without question, two of the most striking figures in modern history. The Emperor was born but a little more than a decade and a half before the Restoration, and he and his royal consort were reared in that strict seclusion obligatory upon families of rank under the old regime. The celebration of their thirty-fifth wedding anniversary on March 9, 1904, and the preparations for the festivities attending the anniversary, remind the thoughtful observer of the remarkable changes that have taken place among the people of that country within the quarter of the century just ended. Not only are the changes manifest among the rank and file of the people, but no where else can be witnessed so striking a contrast as that which is seen in the position of the Emperor and Empress, to say nothing of other members of the Imperial Family.

When Mutsu Hito came to the throne of his fathers, February 13, 1867, he was a lad not yet sixteen years of age, having been born in

Kioto palace November 3, 1852. He was a mere boy, with no knowledge whatever of the world and had lived his short life in that complete isolation which had been the fate of Imperial princes for ages. He had been taught the Chinese classics, how to write poetry and how to arrange flowers according to the elaborate system of the Japanese, and how to conduct

that most punctilious, perfunctory, and elaborate tea ceremony, the *chano-yu*.

Not a very good foundation of character for the ruler of more than forty million people, with which to begin his reign, truly! But his conduct from that time has shown that, in spite of his education and the rigid sequestration of his early life, he is a man of great force of character, with a mind ready to receive and assimilate new ideas. He

has made mistakes, but none of them have been fatal; in his desire to place his country on an equal footing with the civilized nations of the earth he has gone, perhaps, too fast; he has adopted one new idea after another in such quick succession that the

The accompanying article, interesting at any time, is doubly so at present, owing to the war now in progress between Japan and Russia.



Emperor of Japan.

nation at large has not been able to assimilate them properly. He and his statesmen made the mistake of undertaking to arrive at certain desired results with a bound, without any intervening course of preparation or training. They soon saw the error, and now do not undertake to modify current usages until the people have been educated up to the point of receiving the innovations.

It must be remembered that until



Empress of Japan.

1868 the Emperor of Japan was considered the spiritual ruler of the people, and so sacred that none might look upon his face and live; that the people worshipped him as a god; that when he granted an audience, which was very seldom, his face was veiled from the visitor, who must stop a certain distance away from the dais whereon the Mikado squatted; that he was never allowed to wear the same garment

twice, nor to eat off the same dish a second time, both clothing and china being destroyed at once. When one bears these things in mind, then will the present position and condition of the Imperial Family of Japan seem like a modern Arabian Nights tale.

For more than two hundred years the Togugawa family had usurped the temporal power of the Mikado, and arrogated to themselves the privilege of ruling the Island Empire. Little by little, the Shoguns, being soldiers, and at the head of feudalism, had gathered to themselves all the rights, privileges and perquisites of the Mikado. They left him his title, however, the reigning Shogun being content to call himself the Little Tycoon.

Mutso Hito is the hundred and twenty-first ruler of his line, and claims an unbroken descent from Jimmu Tenno, the Son of Heaven, who ruled Japan 660 B. C. He came into power just at a time when the country was ripe for freedom. The door of Japan must be opened; the knocking from within was quite as imperative as had been the dictatorial rat-ta-tat of Commodore Perry from without. He was soon after called upon by a portion of his subjects to place himself at their head to wage war with the Little Tycoon, who had kept the Mikado in the background while he tried to make treaties with foreign countries, who knew not that Japan had any other ruler than the Shogun at the head of the army, in whom was vested all temporal power.

From the strictest seclusion, forth he came, this nineteenth century Mikado, into the broad light of day, the glare of which must have at first half blinded him. In 1868 the Shogun

resigned and retired to the quietude of private life, the various wars were ended and the Restoration complete. The Emperor, at this time, in view of the new duties involving upon him, received the envoys of foreign countries at his palace in Tokio. He was the first Mikado ever to appear in person at a state council. Boy that he was, he took an oath before the court nobles that he would become an actual ruler of his people, and promised that a deliberative assembly should be formed, that all measures should be decided by public opinion, that the uncivilized customs of former times should disappear, and that the impartiality and justice displayed in the workings of nature should be adopted as the basis of action; and, furthermore, that intellect and learning should be sought for throughout the world in order to establish the foundations of his new Empire. After this meeting he traveled from Kioto to Tokio, the new capital, in a gold-lacquered closed litter, borne on the uplifted palms of relays of coolies. Only members of the royal family were allowed to be carried in this way; the kaga, which is used by ordinary folk, is carried on the shoulders of the coolies.

About three years later a long stride in the direction of civilization was taken by the sending of an embassy of forty-nine people round the world to study the various systems of education, science and art. At a public dinner given to them before their departure the Mikado made them an address, in the course of which he said: "We lack superior institutions for high female culture. Our women should not be ignorant of those great principles on which the happiness of daily

life frequently depends. How important the education of mothers, on whom future generations almost wholly rely for the early cultivation of those intellectual tastes which an enlightened system of training is designed to develop! Liberty, is, therefore, granted to wives and sisters to accompany their relatives on foreign tours, that they may acquaint themselves with the better forms of female education, and on their return introduce beneficial im-



The Crown Prince of Japan.

provement in the training of our children."

In 1869, a little more than a year after he ascended the throne, Mutsu Hito married Haruko, the present Empress. She is the daughter of Ichijo Yakada, a noble of the highest rank. The Emperor, no more than his humblest subject, is allowed to make a "love match," unless by some happy chance he fall in love with the woman