Anon. "Formosa and the Japanese." *All the Year Round: A Weekly Journal* No. 326 (27 February 1875): 463-468.

Formosa and the Japanese

[P. 463] In 1683, the island of Formosa fell under the power of the Pekin government. There is not much to tell about its previous history. According to some Chinese MSS. preserved at Macao, it was not discovered by the Chinese till 1480; though, fond as junks are known to be of hugging the coast, we can hardly believe that for ages upon ages they could have failed to find a big island, not much further from the mainland than Brindisi is from the opposite coast of Greece, not so far as Dublin is from Holyhead. Of what the Chinese did there while they had it to themselves, we know little or nothing. They did not teach the natives much; for the poor creatures knew very little indeed when Europeans came among them. No doubt they fished as usual for sea-slug, and gathered edible birds' nests; and they had found out that the camphor-wood of the island is finer than any in China, and had begun to cut it down pretty largely.

In 1524, or thereabouts, the Portuguese sighted a big island, with high mountains, and with such lovely peeps of wooded glen, and sweet grassy valley, that they called it Formosa, the beautiful. After the Portuguese came the Spanish; and then, in 1624, the Dutch founded a factory on the north coast; built a fort -- Fort Zealand (the huge tamarind-tree, which is the only landmark to the wretched harbour of Taiwan-fou, is still called Zealandia); and thought themselves so secure in their position that they started missions to the aborigines, and translated parts of the Bible into Formosan. It is a sad thing for the natives that some European power did not continue to hold the island. Any one of the three who settled there would have been better than the Chinese, who have done nothing for the aborigines but gradually improve them off the face of the earth. If I were tutelary deity of Formosa, and had been given my choice, I should have preferred the Spaniards. Their own country is not a picture of good government; but they seem to have the gift of improving subject races, instead of exterminating them. Not far south of Formosa, in the Philippines, they have done a really good work. The Tagal aborigines are as contented a set as any in the world: the Spaniards have taught them to work and to like work, and have trained their musical capacity till they [p. 464] have become a nation of concert givers. Indeed, on the "greatest happiness of the greatest number" principle we must pronounce the Philippines to be a success; and, had the semi-religious settlement which the Spaniards made in Formosa flourished, I see no reason why Formosa should not have become another Luzon. The Formosans are of the same race as the Tagals, black-toothed betel-chewers, not at all akin to the Chinese, nor yet wholly Malay. They are not a bad people; though, of course, it was needful to get up a cry against them to justify the Japanese invasion. Charles Gutzlaff, the missionary, gives them a character which would suit most "natives" -- "harmless when not provoked."

That Mantchu-Tartar [sic] conquest, which gave China its present rulers, drove the Dutch out of Formosa. Beaten on the mainland, a great number of Chinese (twenty-five thousand, say the records) went across to Formosa. Perhaps the Chinese expected that the Tartars would disappear as quickly as they had come; at any rate, they thought Formosa a handy place from which to watch events. So they gave notice to the Dutch -- "We want our island, and you must go, if you please." For a while there was room for both; for one Nicholaus (an odd name for a Chinaman), a man baptized and brought up at Macao, who had grown to be the richest merchant on Formosa, took the command of the refugees, fitted out a fleet against the Tartars, and swept the coast from Amoy northward. At last he was enticed to Pekin, and his son Koshinga [sic] was driven off from the Chinese seaboard, and forced to take refuge on the island. He then plainly told the Dutch that they must decamp; but Governor Coyet did not see it at all. He sent to Batavia, and brought up the Dutch fleet; on the coming of which Koshinga seemed so mild and peaceable that the admiral made up his mind that Coyet had been frightening himself about nothing, and that he and his guns were not at all wanted. So the fleet sailed off, and the Chinese at once began their attack. They carried one fort, and then the town was abandoned to them; but Fort Zealand [sic] they could not take. The Dutch had fifteen hundred men, the enemy as many thousands; but, whenever they came on, the only result was that the streets were heaped with Chinese dead, and the fort held out as before. The Chinese attack had been so sudden that they had taken a great many prisoners -- missionaries and others; and now, through them, they tried to force a surrender. One of these men, the story tells, behaved like the Roman Regulus; he had lived for years on the island, and Koshinga trusted a great deal to his influence with the governor, and offered him great rewards if he could bring about a capitulation, threatening him at the same time with fearful punishment if he did not succeed. The missionary went, and strongly advised his countrymen to hold out and to send again to Batavia for help. Noticing the anger of the Chinese envoys who accompanied him, Coyet begged him to stay in the fort. "No, I'll be as good as my word," he said, and went back, and was tortured to death in sight of his countrymen. Instead of sending to Batavia, Coyet seems to have sought help from the Tartars at Pekin. The only narrative I can find of the matter is from a Russian source, and is not very clear. Anyhow, a breach was at last made in the walls of Fort Zealand, and Coyet agreed to evacuate the island.

This was in 1662. Eight years later, our East India Company, which spent a good deal of time and energy in feeling about among these distant places, before it settled in good earnest to the work of which our great Indian Empire is the result, began to have dealings with the king of Taywan, as they called Koshinga (Taiwan being the Chinese name of the island). They got leave to set up a factory, on condition "that we may sell or truck our goods with whom we please, and likewise that all may have the same free trade with us; that upon all occasions we may have access to the king's person, and that he shall right us in all wrongs; that all exports be free, and that whatever the king imports shall pay no custom;" but there is the important addition that all ships which

put into port shall give up their guns and ammunition till they sail again. Formosa, on these terms, didn't pay. There was little trade, and the fair-seeming conditions turned out vexatious. In 1681 the Company gave up its factory, and two years after the Mantchus conquered the island, and annexed it to the government of Tokien [sic], of which Amoy is the capital.

From the time the Company left it, the history of Formosa is a blank. The aborigines have mostly been gradually pushed south and east, across the great range of volcanic mountains which cuts the island [p. 465] in two; of course some of them have been tamed by the Chinese, and a good many of the latter have run wild, burst away from etiquette, and mandarins, and his excellency the deputy at Taiwan-fou, and taken to the mountains. Even Chinamen sometimes get restless. When they do so at home, as a rule they turn pirates; but as Formosa is a poor place for pirates -- for two hundred miles at a stretch there is no port of any kind -- a lawless Chinaman, in Formosa, takes not to the sea, but, like Robin Hood, to the great green wood; and very good the greenwood is, as soon as you have passed the foggy, marshy plains, rich with volcanic detritus, where some of the finest rice in the world is grown, and whence sugar is largely exported to China. The coast is far less interesting; it is mostly fringed with low sand hills, and at low water the tide runs out a great way, leaving a broad beach, covered with innumerable little lemon-coloured crabs. As regularly as the tide goes out, down come the monkeys (the island swarms with them) and go crab-hunting; but to look on at this becomes wearisome after a time, and, as there is no other kind of fun going, a man's only consolation is that the coast is wonderfully healthy. During the wet season, when it rains every day, as it can only rain in the tropics, up in the hills, there is seldom a drop on the coast. Of course there is a typhoon now and then; the Tropic of Cancer cuts across the lower end of the island, so it is just in the zone for typhoons; and then trees are torn up, houses blown down, and you hear the bamboo canes in the forest grinding against each other, with a roar like that of a hundred organs. In 1782, the whole island was devastated by a fearful hurricane.

Excepting the monkeys, there are very few *feræ naturæ* -- none in fact, except the stag, the wild buffalo, and the ubiquitous wild pig. It is the same on the Philippines; whereas on the Chinese mainland there are tigers and such like -- a proof, they say, that Formosa was not broken off from China, but possibly once joined to Luzon, the Bashee and other groups of islets remaining as "survivals" of the junction. If monkeys abound on land (so much so that one of the chief peaks is called Mount Ape) alligators are equally numerous in the water. They swarm so that it is seldom safe to cross a river in a light boat, or on a pony -- for the island boasts a few Chinese ponies, imported for the use of luxurious Europeans or fat mandarins.

Then, the underground wealth matches the beauty of the surface. There are mines of gold and copper; and coal is already largely worked. Petroleum, too, "the fuel of the future," is found here as in most other places; and there are the virgin forests,

which will soon get ruined (as they have been nearly all the world over) when civilized man plants himself firmly in the country.

Such is Formosa. Its aborigines, "harmless when not provoked," are fine specimens of humanity. The weaklings die off, and the survivors are wonderfully well shaped, and so strong that, if they escape the chances of savage life, they are out hunting or fighting at three score years and ten, as keenly as if they were barely out of their teens. Everybody goes armed; the ploughmen and shepherd have their bows ready, just as the Jews had when they were building their city wall. Besides bows and arrows, they have very broad swords, and a few old Chinese matchlocks, which they never use without a "rest" to take aim from. When provoked they have an ugly trick of waiting for you at a corner, and cutting you down as you pass. Still, missionaries do not despair of them; the old Spanish work still lingers on, and the English and Americans are at it -- the former (their enemies say) combining a profitable trade, in East India opium and Manchester goods, with the preaching of the Gospel, much as in Tonga and elsewhere they manage to make a very good penny out of arrowroot.

Unattractive as the natives are, the island is coveted by more than one European power. Three years ago, the Germans offered the Chinese government five million dollars for it. There was no indemnity to pay just then; so China refused. But after the next opium, or treaty-port, or missionary war, the emperor may, perhaps, be compelled to sell. Quite lately Italy has been trying, in a humbler way, to plant a factory; but hitherto, with little success. Last year, however, Formosa was a great deal in the newspapers; every mail brought news of the expected rupture between China and Japan; and all because a few Japanese fisherman had been massacred by the aborigines, on the south-east of Formosa. Japan conveniently forgot that, not many years ago, it was her custom also to kill those unlucky enough to be ship-wrecked [p. 466] on her shores; nay, moreover, to kill any Japanese, who, having been cast away on any foreign land, should afterwards get back to his native country. But Japan is now civilized -- she has railways, telegraphs, an army dressed up in European clothes, and above all, a national debt. No wonder she felt aggrieved at the barbarism of the Formosans.

Why they should have become so barbarous all of a sudden is a mystery; for, eight years ago, an American (Legendre [sic], Consul at Amoy) took occasion, from the massacre of the crew of the Rover, to go over to Formosa, "interview" several chiefs -- notably the great Tok-e-tok -- and make a compact, whereby all ship-wrecked folks should be held to ransom, instead of being killed. It was a bold thing to do; and for some time it was successful. A notable instance of this occurred in 1871, when a junk belonging to an English company put in to cut wood. After getting a load, it was caught in a typhoon and swamped, with the loss of seventeen out of a crew of thirty-five. The eighteen survivors were not killed, but shut up in a shed, and word was passed on across the island to Mr. Pickering, the agent at Taiwan-fou. He at once sent two Englishmen southward to enquire into the truth of the matter; and the journey (in great part on foot) of Mr. Hughes and his friend is, in its way, as noteworthy as that of

the Forrests [sic] across Western Australia. From the natives they met with no hindrance; once only a Boutan (the Boutans are the wildest tribe, in the extreme south-east), probably drunk with bhang or opium, drew his big sword, and began to dance round them, foaming at the mouth, rolling his eyes, and looking in general as if he was going to "run a-muck." But just as they were getting frightened, out rushed the man's wife, tall and comely like most of the Boutan women, wrenched the sword out of her husband's hand, and drove him, with much scolding, into his hut. Next day the poor fellow came and humbly begged pardon, offering a practical illustration of the way in which women's rights are respected in lat. 23° N. long. 121° E. Arrived at Tok-e-tok's village, they found that chief out hunting, but were hospitably received by his wives, who gave them venison cooked in half-a-dozen ways, fresh pork, delicious rice, and the alternative between splendidly pure water and shamsou (sweet-potato spirit). Of course two white men at dinner brought the whole village to look on; but, though the lattice-work hut, which was Tok-e-tok's palace, was beset with eager eyes, not a soul incommoded them. If any one was pushed in by the press outside, a look from the ladies sufficed to send him out utterly ashamed of himself. On the whole the story reminds us of the old prints of the French king dining in public, with the eager Parisians watching the while; though, probably, the Parisians were more pushing than the Boutans. Even now-a-days we, in England, know something of this crowding to see distinguished personages eat.

Very early next day the chief came back, and at once arranged an open-air conference, which was inaugurated by an old woman stepping into the midst of the assemblage, and chanting an invocation to peace and goodwill. It was arranged that the eighteen should be sent to Taiwan-fou as soon as the ransom, according to tariff, had been paid. The delight of these poor creatures, who thought they were being kept to be eaten, may well be imagined, and Mr. Hughes was anxious to return with all speed and send the money. But Tok-e-Tok insisted on their staying to a great feast; and they, judging (a little harshly, to my thinking) that they were on ticklish ground, and that it only needed two or three glasses of shamsou to turn their kind hosts into furious madmen, thought it best to yield. They were not kept long waiting. A hundred hunters sailed out at once, and returned in a few hours loaded with deer, boars, and small game; these were skinned, and the feast began as quickly as the feasts described in Homer or Virgil. What astonished the white men was that while everybody else had a layer of banana leaves for plates, for them were set plate, knife, fork -- all complete. Sheffield and Birmingham and Stoke-upon-Trent had managed to get their goods right into the wildest part of Formosa, as, indeed, they somehow manage to get them everywhere. The feast over, the war-dance began, and then (by way of ballet) a wonderful imitation of a cock-fight; and at last, by moonlight, the whole tribe escorted the two whites to their boundary, and, in their fashion, bade them good speed. In due time the eighteen were safely handed over to Mr. Pickering.

If this is a fair sample of Boutan procedure, it is hard to understand how they could so far have forgotten themselves as to have killed, in 1873 [sic], fifty Japanese subjects. I believe there must be some [p. 467] mistake in the numbers; though Japanese practice and the memories of our own wreckers make ugly stories of that kind credible enough. But the Japanese wanted a war to keep their army in good humour. It is not everybody in Japan who likes the wholesale changes, which have stripped the daimios of their hereditary privileges, forced rich and poor to alter their style of dress, broken up the priesthood -- in fact, done more, in six years, than has been done in Europe in as many centuries. Railways and telegraphs and iron-clads and paper-money are all good in their way, though Japanese Tories may well sigh for the good old days when the export of gold was forbidden; but the Samourai [sic] (military dependents of the chiefs) are a large class, suddenly thrown out of the means of life, and deprived of social consideration. They had been restless for some time; and two years ago a revolt broke out in Kinsin, the cry being, "War with Corea; death to the Jo-i (strangers); restoration of feudalism." Only by great efforts were the insurgents, who had burnt a castle and beaten a detachment of the Mikado's troops, crushed, before the revolt had spread over the whole group of islands. Just then the Japanese envoy, who in 1873 managed, along with the European envoys, to get himself presented to the Chinese emperor, returned. He had brought the Formosan outrages very strongly before the Pekin government; but Prince Kung's answer had been: "non possumus -- we are powerless, unhappily, in South Formosa." The Japanese were naturally angry; Legendre, who had gone back with them from Pekin to Jeddo, and who in 1871 had been surveying on the Formosan coast, offered maps and charts; and, since the alternative seemed to lie between a foreign war and disaffection at home, the cry was, "If China cannot or will not right us, we must right ourselves."

There was not much danger, except from typhoons; for the fighting men of the eighteen independent Formosan tribes do not number altogether more than two thousand five hundred, and those whom the Japanese despatches [sic] characterised as "bad" they only estimated at six hundred. Still there was this risk; the Formosan expedition might lead to a war with China, and in such a war defeat would have been ruinous -- would have thrown Japan back some centuries at least, and would have brought into the field Russia or Germany, who are eagerly watching to force themselves in as allies.

The expedition was, like all such affairs, when undertaken by a trader-ridden country like Japan, ten times as costly as it ought to have been; a whole swarm of white jobbers and traders had something or other to get off their hands, which was, of course, bought at the seller's price. Last May it sailed -- three thousand five hundred men, in three war steamers, a gunboat, and an armed sloop, besides a transport full of mechanics, with frames, &c., to build houses for a little colony. Three Boutan villages were soon ablaze; and there was a battle up a valley, in which the Japanese lost twelve killed and wounded. They killed the chief and his son, known by their silver finger-

rings, and so terrified the other tribes that they came in to make submission, bringing dried fish and firewood. In July the grand battle took place. The heights were stormed; the Boutans fired their matchlocks under cover of their leaf-thatched huts, but they were beaten out, and what became of the survivors nobody knows. If they did not succeed in gaining the mountains they were probably cut to pieces by the other tribes. And so Japan took full rank as a civilised state by exterminating a tribe of barbarians. It is a little unpleasant to learn that the Japanese cut off and carried away the heads of their dead enemies; but then they have only had, at most, ten years of European culture.

Then followed a great peace-making. The Japanese general distributed flags to all the tribes who had made submission, and gave them champagne, which so touched their hearts, that they burst into tears, cursed the Boutans, and swore eternal friendship to the Mikado.

All this time the Chinese had made no sign; Japanese energy seemed to have paralyzed them; but now that everything was over, the taotai (governor) posted up a proclamation in Taiwan-fou, telling the people that "the Japanese came to punish the murderous Boutans. They have punished them; but, as they seem inclined to prolong their stay, the Chinese Emperor tells me he has sent two high officers to order them to go. The Boutans were to blame; but it was our business to deal with them. Meanwhile, the emperor bids all the tribes to put aside their arms, and go on with their usual work; he will settle matters with Japan." In this way the Chinese avoided a war -- by delaying all interference [p. 468] until the Japanese had done everything that they had the slightest excuse for doing. Saïgo, the Japanese general, of course, declined to give way to the two commissioners: "we are here; and we shall hold a fort for the protection of our ship-wrecked people." "But you mustn't stay," said the Chinese; and at last, after much diplomacy and many fierce messages, Japan caved in for the present, and Formosa is no longer a *casus belli*.

But what has happened is enough to make us thoughtful for the future. A hostile encounter between China and Japan, with their huge armies and growing steam fleets, could not fail to have its effect on India; and India touched, means England alarmed. So even the little-known island of Formosa may at any time be the cause of trouble here in the west.