

**DIVISION OF THE HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES**  
**CALIFORNIA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY**

**PASADENA, CALIFORNIA 91125**

CHAPTER IV-1 - GRIFFIS IN TOKYO

Robert A. Rosenstone



# HUMANITIES WORKING PAPER 90

© Robert A. Rosenstone June 1983

## Abstract

In which William E. Griffis spends more than two years in Tokyo, teaching science, promoting Christian activities, and writing on Japan for American publications, and how his sister Maggie comes to live with him, and how during those two years he keeps longing for the traditional Japan that he is helping to destroy, the Japan he so precipitously fled from in Fukui.

## CHAPTER IV-1 - GRIFFIS IN TOKYO

Robert A. Rosenstone

Huge, thrusting noses. Jutting chins. Blue eyes that stare ferociously. Hair, so much of it and such odd colors -- blond and red and a hundred shades of brown. Beards swallow features, moustaches droop into scowls. Skin so white, so deathly pale, so unnatural. Repulsive creatures, and their clothing only makes it worse. A riot of outrageous colors. Odd shaped hats. No harmony, no familiar patterns to soothe the eye. Jerky movements. Through the streets they lurch and swagger. No grace when they reach for something, no delicacy when they gesture. Voices too loud, insistent, the tones of language oddly harsh. No manners at all. In laughter, they do not bother to cover naked mouths with a hand. In greeting, they neglect to return your bows.

February 2, 1872. Yokohama. Eyes and ears expect the familiar, learn the familiar is not what it used to be. A shock to encounter such change. A greater one to recognize the change is not out there but in the self. So that's what it means to be in the interior for ten months. The very sense organs alter. You return with the "ken of a native." You expect smooth faces, indirect glances, contained movements, dark colors, simple robes, cheery greetings. Instead you enter the jarring, raucous realm of an alien race, boisterous invaders

of a land that is suddenly your own. For a moment you have to wonder if returning has been a terrible mistake.

No, it does not last. Cannot last. Would not want it to last. Not if you are William E. Griffis and you have travelled thirteen days to get here; not if you have covered three hundred miles by foot, kago and boat; not if you are "blistered, weary and sore and faint" from pushing too hard, sleeping too little, and living on a sparse, meatless diet. The odd vision slips away as you call on friends, visit the tailor to order a new suit of clothes, spend an evening with Reverend Ballagh, his wife and two "lovely little" daughters. Grace before dinner, familiar foods on the table and then the "dear old music" of the piano playing "Dixieland" and "Home Sweet Home." Prayers of thanks for the safe journey, the safe year, and for loved ones far away, and then the comfort of a Western bed. Here the vision may momentarily return. Sleep will drown it as daily life banishes it later. But never for good. It is part of him now, that odd sight from somewhere outside the self. Ever after, at odd moments he will be able to "see as the Japanese see."

Dense fog the next morning. Brightness in the heart. Griffis catches the eight-thirty steamer for the capital, gorges himself on luncheon delicacies at the French hotel, takes a stroll. Rip Van Winkle comes to mind. Only eleven months have passed, but everywhere "great changes and improvements" greet an eager eye. Narrow streets are crowded with horse-drawn carriages, buggies, traps, and swarms of jiriksha, unknown just a year ago. He sees brick houses, glass set

into once-paper, windows of older structures, butcher stalls and barber shops with candy striped poles and new stores selling Western goods. Most startling are the alterations in male attire: thousands have had top-knots cut and comb their hair in Western fashion; few any longer wear two swords; large numbers have abandoned traditional garb for hats, coats, trousers and boots, "the more serviceable, but not so becoming dress of the civilized world."

Back from exile, from a year of dwelling in the wilderness. That's the feeling as he settles once more into the Tsukiji home of "warm-hearted" Guido Verbeck. Nothing can be sweeter than old familiar sensations -- to hear English spoken as a mother tongue, to browse for hours through newspapers and journals from home, to dwell again among people of his own beliefs. At long last a desire for religious companionship can be satisfied. Sunday in Yokohama is full of Christian activities. On the morning of February 11, "the pleasure of worshipping God with a congregation" in Japan's first protestant church. That afternoon he attends services for Japanese in Reverend Ballagh's chapel, and in the evening tastes the "social" side of religion at the Bluff home of Mary Pruyn, where a prayer-meeting brings together a mixed group of the faithful -- local merchants, Red Coats from the British Army Camp, Blue Shirts off American war vessels.

Rest, reading and relaxation soon give way to duty. On bleached, winter days when snow piles onto roofs and muddies unpaved streets, he visits the site of the new Polytechnic School, the Shidzuoka yashiki, to choose a lecture room; meets with the Minister of Education and

agrees to teach both chemistry and physics; drops into a government godown to examine available chemicals and apparatus; begins to plan lectures and demonstrations. Free time finds him at the homes of other foreigners, revisiting the temples at Asakusa and Ueno, exploring the tomb of the forty-seven ronin and the now-unguarded, inner recesses of the Shogun's palace. The furnishing of a new house in a foreign "Compound" at the edge of the castle moat occupies him for awhile. So does substitute teaching for a professor at Daigaku Nanko and meeting with missionaries to plan the construction of a Tokyo church.

Three weeks of such activity leave Griffis feeling restless, anxious to work. But his employer cannot be hurried. Repeated delays in the opening of the new school make him nervous. No wonder he seizes so eagerly on a suggestion made by a visiting San Francisco publisher that he partake in a project aimed at getting the "best teachers in Japan" to create a series of school books designed especially for Japanese students. He will begin with a primer, then go on to geography and chemistry texts. Money is involved, his cut is to be five percent of the cost of the volumes. But so deeply does Griffis desire to be usefully employed that perhaps one can believe the comment, "I should be willing almost to do it for nothing."

By mid-March the pleasure of return is on wane. Clear days bring stunning views of Fuji, the streets remain a jostling turmoil of old and new, but Griffis is bored. Once he has noted the changes in Tokyo and visited the palace and many temples and driven the new road that winds down from the Bluff and along Mississippi Bay and endlessly

discussed with missionaries the hopeful prospects for Christianity here and witnessed the baptism of several Japanese and dropped in to meet the twenty-seven young ladies of Mrs. Veeder's first public school for girls and seen the experimental farm of the American agricultural mission headed by General Horace Capron, there is little to do but start the round over again. Letters home are short because there is "nothing special to write about my own quiet life." Only to Maggie can he admit a truth that will color all his Tokyo days: "Much of the charm and novelty of Japanese life is worn off."

Settling Griffis in Tokyo is no problem, but his two and a half years there present real difficulties. The period in the capital seems shapeless. Emotional ups and downs are common enough. So are bursts of energy, passion, hard work, enthusiasm. But missing are the elements of drama found in Fukui. Here is no tale of a young man's growth, temptation and flight, no story neatly bounded by a horseback entrance and a snowy retreat on foot. Tokyo is a series of disconnected episodes with no movement towards a climax, no resolution, no achievement of personal insight. For this you do not have to take the biographer's word. Griffis implicitly agrees. Much as he likes to dramatize his own experience, he is never able to depict the Tokyo years as a whole, or turn them into the kind of narrative that, in The Mikado's Empire, portrays Fukui as a dramatic period of growing insight into both Japanese civilization and the self. Events in the

capital elude such treatment; here political, social and economic change always overwhelms the personal.

Anti-climax is the prevailing mood, with Griffis no longer the center of anyone's attention but ours and his. The stage here is far too crowded with similar characters. Some three hundred Westerners -- British, French, Prussians, Americans -- serve the central government as teachers and engineers, agricultural, legal and military experts, and no single individual can claim much personal impact on social change. For Griffis, Tokyo means a sharp alteration in lifestyle. Cut off from Japanese home life and casual contact with the natives, his connection to the nation becomes -- outside the classroom -- indirect. His world is that of the 2,500 foreigners who live in Tokyo and Yokohama; it is bounded by the institutions of their community -- the church, social clubs, the Asiatic Society, the English-language newspapers. In the capital he will socialize more with Western professors, merchants, missionaries, diplomats and naval officers than with native scholars, samurai, princes or government officials.

The situation cannot make him happy. Continually he strains against boundaries, endeavors to portray himself as a mover of history. Contemporary evidence, including that from his own pen, contradicts this view. Great change will mark his stay in the capital, but Griffis relates to it largely as a witness, or chronicler of events. Denial of this role takes more than one form. When Tokyo seems "too much like home and too little like Japan," he flees the capital for rural areas in search of "something more primitive, more purely Japanese;" when at

home, he elaborates fantasies of self-importance. His letters are full of extravagant claims -- he has the ear of high officials; his advice will shape the future of the nation. Long after leaving Japan -- indeed, for the rest of his life -- the same grandiosity will color his biographical and historical writings. Repeatedly Griffis will step forward in his own pages to take a place among those depicted as major figures in the creation of the "New Japan" -- Westerners like Perry, Townsend Harris, Verbeck and Hepburn, Meiji leaders like Mori Akinori, Iwakura Tomomi, Fukuzawa Yukichi, even the Emperor.

The need to see himself as an agent of social change is in part a legacy of Fukui. There social progress and personal ambition are linked, there Griffis may be accepted to some extent on his own terms, as a principal mover in a story of momentous change. In the capital, such a notion is impossible to maintain. A cloud of thwarted ambition hovers over the period. Bouts of anger and depression, quarrels with officials, expressions of cynicism and disgust toward the government -- all these mark the Tokyo years and seem to issue from the gap between large desires and the realities of daily life. Were Griffis really an important actor, the years in the capital might produce drama. Instead, the journal, letters, articles and later books provide incidents, opinions, feelings, moods. To capture the period, we must settle for quick takes, individual scenes, moments of insight, and always resist the impulse towards a smooth flow of narrative that neither subject nor biographer can find amidst the sprawl of thirty months.

Loneliness -- that is the unexpected companion. Griffis thinks it has remained behind in Fukui. He is wrong. It persists and deepens amidst the crowds of Tokyo. Companionship seems a possible cure. The first letter home from the capital poses the question to Maggie: would she, or Mary or Martha like to work in Japan? He urges them on with promises of "all the comforts of home," of "good society and good physicians." He suggests to the government the establishment of a seminary for young women, hoping positions will open for one or all of his sisters. Often he visits Yokohama to see Mary Pruyn, a woman of such intellect, sweetness, energy, fervor and piety that he confesses "my love and admiration for her is intense," and wishes his mother could meet her.

She never will. On March 26, this simple diary entry -- "American mail in, and read of mother's death." Words cannot carry the burden of feelings. A great chasm has opened; a void has replaced security, continuity, understanding, acceptance, "changeless" love. Something must fill it, take her place. Off he rushes to Mary Pruyn, but sympathy cannot banish grief. Sad memories of mother gather and multiply through the weeks, become strangely intertwined with "the untold and secret sorrow" that sent him to Japan -- Ellen Johnson. Sharp, painful images of that young lady once troubled him "amid the grand silences of the mountains of Echizen." Now pain over both losses grows day-by-day until he is weighted with a cross "too heavy to bear" and his letters shriek, "I must have company. I can't stand it alone."

Death as enlightenment. It raises to a conscious level his strong need for a woman. Knowing the odds to be "one in a million," he writes Ellen "asking her to come to me." Easy to say that this only proves him to be "a fool," but Griffis is canny enough to hedge bets. Requests that a sister join him now become demands. Little surprise that Maggie is the one he wants and Maggie he shall have. Indirectly -- shall we say unconsciously? -- he applies financial pressure, withdraws the rent subsidy on their Philadelphia home. The household must break up, and his father and brothers shift for themselves; and the unspoken price of continued financial support for Mary and Martha is Maggie.

She lands in August, a month later than expected. The delay is his fault. Griffis has failed to inform Maggie that he is sending passage money not to the shipping company, but to a friend in San Francisco, and she cannot board the July steamer. This act calls out for explanation. So do revealing phrases in letters home, those expressions of need voiced in the long months between the decision and her arrival: "I want someone to love, to be with me and we can keep house together . . . if I can't have a wife, I shall do the best I can with a sister." No proof of anything, just the suggestion that the confusion of roles -- sister, wife, companion and, yes, mother -- connect to the "mistake." You may notice a strange ambivalence, the coupling of desire and fear in his wish to live with a woman. Perhaps Ellen Johnson also senses this. In the letter once again refusing the marriage offer, she begs forgiveness for having "wronged" Griffis, but

insists with God as a witness, "I could do no otherwise than I did, in justice either to you or myself."

He is a professor again, but not quite as expected. One week after news of mother's death, on April 2, 1872, the government cancels plans for the Polytechnic School -- evidently there are not enough good students to fill it. Any upset Griffis may feel is brushed aside by alternative offers: a position either as an instructor in the Department of Public Works or as a professor in Daigaku Nanko, the highest school in the realm. No surprise that he takes the latter. The faculty includes seventeen foreign instructors in English, German and French departments; Griffis immediately claims "I occupy a position second only to that of Mr. Verbeck, the president." What this may mean, he never bothers to explain, but at faculty meetings and at the "mess" where teachers gather for meals, he assumes towards others an attitude of "polite deference rather than familiarity."

With students he is more relaxed -- "Began teaching Nanko today, & enjoyed it fully." His subjects are chemistry, physiology, comparative philology and moral science; his pupils the "most advanced" of the five hundred who attend this seven-year program that combines high school and college. At first it is a repeat of Fukui. He finds the young men "bright, eager and industrious;" is proud they will in the future become "the leading men in Japan;" glories in work as a "gladsome thing . . . my chief joy in life." Genuine the sentiment may be, but there is no reason to apply it solely to teaching. The routine of the classroom is

better suggested in the recurrent diary entries: "Usual day at school."

He is a preacher once again as well. The first letter home from Tokyo proudly announces that "several sources" see Griffis as the future pastor of the first Yokohama church. No further mention of this, but between March and June he takes the pulpit on five occasions. With the onset of teaching duties, he sometimes forsakes the Sunday trip to Yokohama for a quiet day at home. But religious activities remain central. He subscribes one hundred dollars towards the construction of the first Tokyo church in Tsukiji, and when it opens in September, 1872, is listed as an elder. In print he issues a call both to "professing Christians" and those "who have not yet publicly professed Christ" to join the congregation, and late in January of the next year he conducts services there for the first time.

The press is another pulpit, one with a wider audience. In local English-language newspapers -- the Gazette, the Herald, the Weekly Mail -- Griffis identifies on religious issues with both the missionary community and the Meiji government, defends the former against attacks as despoilers of native tradition and the latter against charges of persecuting Christians. Faith does not prevent him from being honest. Articles on Sabbath in Tokyo report only a quarter of the more than one hundred English-speaking residents of the capital actually in attendance at the white frame church with its stained glass windows, sweet-sounding bell and spire topped with a saxon cross. Nor is he

there every week. During the last eighteen months in Japan Griffis does no preaching. On April 27, 1873, he notes for the first time, after years of journal-keeping: "church as usual."

Enter Maggie. Until now she has been in the wings, the recipient of Willie's letters, the confidante to whom he confesses the most secret aspirations and sorrows. She appears before us in photographs taken during her two-year stay, as author of a two-hundred page journal and writer of a score of letters home. The face is plain, that of a thirty-four year old spinster -- fiftyish by modern standards -- who will realize amid the powdered and kimono-clad young ladies of Japan that she is no longer young, but "old and ugly." The journal and letters reveal the attitudes, desires and pains beneath the homely surface: Maggie is sickly, conventional, socially ambitious. Her Japan days are haunted by memories of mother, and tears of homesickness are common enough, she knows one thing well -- how to endure.

Brother Willie is the chief man in her life, a source of support and stability that her father can no longer be; she coddles, comforts and protects him, manipulates him when possible, nags him when necessary, accepts -- in short -- that role as wife, mother, sister, housekeeper, secretary. Her view of Griffis can hardly be disinterested, but it is the only one we have that does not issue from his own words. Psychically close for many years, brother and sister now occupy the same physical space, one unrelieved by the presence of other family members. Maggie's realm will always be narrower than that

of Willie, but for two years it overlaps his enough so that to understand her in Japan is to put him into deeper perspective.

Griffis has changed. That she sees at once. He is "not our old Willie at all." She remembers a brother who was a jolly, talkative, open; finds, instead, a man who seldom smiles; who seems alternately closed, severe, cynical, irritable, and impatient; who feels "superior to all who are not up to his level of thought," remains "independent of everybody's opinion," cares little whether people like him or not, and is too "uncivilized" to disguise such anti-social attitudes. The cause, for Maggie, is easy to pinpoint: Ellen. The cure is equally apparent: "Willie . . . needs to get married to soften him." Since none of the young ladies in Yokohama strike his fancy, it falls upon her to cheer him up. By late October she claims success: "He has grown quite gay, and is just as loving as anyone could possibly be."

Missing here is the word "generous." With good reason. Between brother and sister money has always been both a bond and a sore spot. The family's financial demands upon Griffis have been too heavy to allow for much spontaneous giving, and Maggie has been the one to continually urge him to greater efforts. For all his large income, Willie in Fukui felt so burdened by money matters that finances occupy almost as much space in his letters as descriptions of daily life. Part of this is self-imposed: tired of debt, Griffis dreams of standing free and clear before the world. Over half of his first year salary has gone home to pay off loans and help the family. Now he has volunteered to cover mother's medical and funeral expenses and "do all

he can" to help both sisters at home. But that is the limit. Death has freed him to say no, to refuse any more specific commitments.

Brother and sister close ranks. Maggie takes up the task of handling the family, warns her sisters away from troubling Willie, insists it is time to be understanding: he deserves a respite from claims because he works so hard, lives so frugally. No question that this is true enough, yet in such words one may also sense a conspiracy between siblings. Or perhaps we merely confront once more the fact that in life, as in history, point of view is all. In Fukui there was always a gap between claims of a spartan life, announced regularly by boasts of living on rice and fish, and the reality of a diet rich in meat and fowl, of tinned foods imported from Yokohama, liquor served to friends, a grand house with four servants. Yes, the house may have been free and salaries low, but the point is this: Willie exaggerates his poverty. Now the pattern continues, with Maggie as accomplice. She is the one to claim a "modest" lifestyle while describing a round of activities in which food, travel and recreation seem plentiful.

They live in a garden compound for foreign professors, hidden from city streets by a high wall. On one side, the moat surrounding old Fdo castle, with the bridge and great gate known as Hitotsubashi; on the other side, the campus of Daigaku Nanko. Their house is large enough to allow Maggie to preside as "Queen," with Griffis "first interpreter to her Majesty." The realm consists of eight rooms; the subjects are three -- a male cook, a female maid, a man to tend the garden and serve as "horse" for their ricksha. Housekeeping is very different from at

home; here there is "no work, only management." Each evening Maggie hands the cook "a certain sum" to buy provisions. She may fuss over the lack of silver and good linen cloths for the table, but food is never in short supply. Breakfast includes tea or coffee, toast, omelette, sausages, fried potatoes and rice-batter cakes with syrup. Dinner consists of soup, fish and potatoes, meat and vegetables, boiled rice and curry, dessert. To Maggie this diet does not seem unusual: "Everybody lives in this manner and some have as high as seven courses." Nor does she think it extravagant to stock their larder with canned fruit and meats or to import butter is imported from San Francisco.

Expectations of a teaching position for Maggie recede from week to week; not until March, 1873, does she land a regular job. For her -- no doubt for Willie as well -- it is a difficult six months. She suffers from illnesses -- her face swells with lacquer poisoning from a new piece of furniture; she endures heart palpitations, fevers, indigestion, the beginning of pains in the uterus that will eventually leave her almost unable to walk. Routine becomes another kind of pain -- "monotonous day" and "another dull day" appear regularly in her diary. Willie is not easy to live with. Often he is busy, teaching in the morning, writing in the afternoons. At home, he speaks little; she complains their house feels "empty." Work brings the pleasure of a salary and occupies three hours a day, but teaching interests her so little that both subjects and pupils are virtually absent from all her writings. Over the months she grows "accustomed to life here" but

never comes to love it. Ambivalence is perpetual, and Maggie equally likely to claim to be "much happier than I was at first" or to say "Japan does not agree with me." Sheltered as a woman, she is doubly so as a foreigner. But this condition can lead to rare insight. Maggie is the one to voice a truth that applies to both of them, to all Westerners in the capital: "I see . . . very little of real Japanese life." Students and government officials may sometimes come to dinner, but all the natives "whom we know wear foreign dress, speak English and are entirely like ourselves." Not until February, 1873, will she attend a real Japanese "entertainment" with singing and dancing girls; not until November of that year, fifteen months after arrival, will she take a meal in a Japanese home.

To say Maggie endures is to tell but part of her story. She loves those festive occasions when Japanese life "in its glory" of costumes, banners, lanterns, food and games spills through Tokyo in a colorful riot of noise and excitement -- cherry blossom season at Mukojima; the opening of the Sumida River with boats full of flowers and musicians; the inauguration of the railroad when the Emperor startles her into an instant of ecstasy by bowing in her direction. More important are the social activities of the European community, the monthly meetings of the Hitotsubashi cultural society, the diplomatic and military receptions, the musicals on the Bluff, the social whirl of Yokohama's cosmopolitan community. Sponsored by a Mrs. Baker, wife of a wealthy merchant, Maggie moves among the most "high flung" people, mingles with British, French, Spanish, Italian, Greek and Dutch "Lords & Ladies" at

parties like those "often read of in books." That she cannot afford clothing like those of the rich, whose gowns come from Paris, is only a small drawback. She remains in mourning for two years, always wears the same dress in the belief that "black excuses all."

No doubt about it -- for Maggie these social contacts are the pinnacle of the Japan experience. Many things in the land impress her deeply -- the beauty of the countryside, the friendliness and honesty of the people, the sense of history brooding over ancient shrines, graveyards and battlefields, the high hopes that the nation will soon become Christian. But all that can easily be left behind. What will always remain are glimpses of alluring realms which serve to fuel a social ambition that can never be satisfied back amidst the genteel poverty of Philadelphia. Ultimately Japan is only a setting for something else -- a high status, a place in "society" -- that she sadly knows cannot continue at home: "It will be very hard to go back to the old life after two years here of . . . perfect equality in society and even superiority to many."

They live together, but with different dreams. Maggie is passive, Griffis active; she a spinster bypassed by life; he a young man bursting with potential. Her aim is to care for him, earn some money, pass the time until returning home; his is to create some sort of future. Her presence keeps temptation at bay, provides a center, a refuge from the world, a base from which to launch a career. He is good to her within the limits of his own problems, takes her on

journeys, allows himself to be dragged to more social affairs in Yokohama than are to his taste. But his mind is often elsewhere. New possibilities, new anxieties. Between the lines of letters, in petulant actions and outbursts of impatience, one senses the internal struggle of his Tokyo days, catches a glimpse of a Griffis aching towards a new direction.

"He will not be a minister . . . he wants to be a literary man." This startling announcement in one of Maggie's first letters home. She excuses the statement as perhaps premature, swears her sisters to secrecy, never again repeats it. But she is not wrong. Eyes fresh from America catch the deepest of changes in Willie. "Temptation" is once again the proper word, but now with no sensual overtones and only so much of the erotic as may be contained in the lust for success. For a decade Griffis has looked forward to a career in the ministry. Teaching, lecturing and writing have only been ways to earn a living until a pulpit is his. A year in Japan has severely shaken this once-firm life plan, but not until July, 1873, does Willie admit that whatever his future -- be it as minister, professor or writer -- only to the press does he feel "committed for life."

How to explain this to others; how to justify it to oneself? Griffis never tries. His decline of interest in teaching and religion may be seen largely in gaps and omissions, less in what is committed to paper than in what is left out. Entries on these topics are increasingly infrequent and routine, while letters home suggest rising excitement over the possibilities of learning the professional

"magazine game." Often he tests ideas in the local, English-language press or in lectures to the Asiatic Society, then mails articles off to mass circulation newspapers or prestigious journals at home. Success is quick to come. Overland Monthly, Appleton's Journal and Lippincott's all accept pieces, and soon he has enough of a reputation for the Chicago Tribune to suggest an article and the American Encyclopedia to commission an entry on Japan. This "fine feather . . . in my cap" is more important than any monetary reward, for it brings a once-fanciful notion close to reality. On September 25, 1873, he takes the plunge: "Made plan for my book tonight." By the end of the next month, with several chapters under way, he is looking beyond a single volume: "I shall make Japanese subjects a study for life, and shall work the mine as long as it pays."

No necessity to dig very deep. Suitable topics are everywhere at hand for someone willing to utilize his own eyes and the language abilities of his students. His articles deal with the humble and the high born, the cultural and the political, the religious and the secular. The main theme is easy to anticipate -- the glories of Westernization. He likes to personalize abstract issues by focusing on the Emperor as a symbol of everything progressive. The young Mutsuhito is abandoning traditions that would keep him a wholly-sequestered, divine figure, and has begun to humanize, even democratize his position -- he rides in an open carriage; makes official visits to arsenals, dockyards, schools; shakes hands with the American Ambassador and other diplomats; receives with grace the first Japanese translation of the

Bible. Meanwhile his government strives to bring Japanese practices into line with those of Western nations. The growth in public education, the promises of representative government, the beginnings of a native-language press, the shift from the Chinese to the Gregorian calendar and the installation of public urinals in Tokyo -- all are greeted as important examples of advances "in true civilization."

"Extraordinary progress" is not limited to the material -- it is moral and spiritual as well. Proclamations compel workers to cover their bodies with clothing, forbid the sale of phallic symbols, abolish the selling of girls into prostitution, and require that bathhouses be divided into separate sections for men and women. That Christianity is ready to march through the land may be seen in portents large and small -- the baptisms of Japanese, the formation of a native church in Yokohama, even the placement of a Brussels carpet and a gilt-edged, Western mirror in a state Shinto shrine. Best of all is the removal in 1872 from the kosatsu, those public announcement boards, of the two-hundred fifty year old ban on Western religion. Here is a major step towards "that modern cosmopolitan civilization which is stamping its character on the entire world."

Bells chiming, cannons firing in salute, cheers and waving hats -- that's what you expect right now, since all he wants and hopes for Japan seems to be coming true. But no, that is only part of the picture in his articles, the desire in his heart. Muffle the bells and cannon, quiet the cheers and listen to the other part, to the man who has come to fear the cost of progress, to the man who wishes to hold on

the past. You can sense him in the subjects of articles -- "Fox Myths," "The Festival of Dolls," "Games and Sports of Children," "Japanese Proverbs," "Mythical Zoology," "A Daimio's Life," "Shintoism," "Call on a Bonze." You can find him in loving descriptions of the great temples of the capital, "honorable with age and history," in praise for fervent Buddhists, worshippers of a faith "that was old when our Master's doctrine was new." You can hear him in the strong objections voiced to a semi-official proposal that English be made the national language, in laments over the demolition of the great gates of the Shogun's castle, in horror expressed at plans to fill the moats to make room for housing or to cut and sell the sacred groves of Shiba Temple to raise revenue.

Once again a man divided, torn between old and new. Documents can do little to let us understand the irreconcilable tugging in opposite directions, the non-terminating argument in his heart. To know Griffis, the historian must look within, must recognize that his condition is not so different from our own, situated as we are between a future where hope and fear balance on a shaky tightrope and a past that slips through our words and categories even as we attempt to define it. His may seem a simpler world, a less fearsome choice, but the internal tension is the same. Yes, Griffis shares much with us, but there is a major difference -- his future is our history. This provides the vantage point, the perspective that lets us see his problems better than our own, that lets us judge his love for Japan as a kind of luxury of the victorious, of someone so confident that

history is on his side that he can afford to indulge in nostalgia for what is passing away. No, he is not conscious of this, any more than he is conscious of the tension that runs through his life and work. But we can see this tension as creative, can understand that in the struggle between love for old Japan and hope for change, William F. Griffis the professional writer is born.

Friday, July 18, 1873. Precisely at five p.m. the narrow gauge train pulls out of Shinagawa station. Nice to see the Japanese finally learning "the priceless value of time." A conductor, clad in dark-blue, salutes, then punches tickets printed in English, French, German, Chinese and Japanese. Thirty-five minutes to Kanagawa. Views of the great bay, crowded with warships and fishing boats, frigates and iron-clads. Glimpses of the once-busy highway to Yokohama, its hotels deserted, tea houses overgrown. Just wait, Maggie. Beyond Kanagawa lies the past. Japan's. My own. You will see it for seven days from a lurching ricksha, the Tokaido almost as of old, winding through tea plantations on craggy hills, straightening an aisle of pines through rice fields of the sea plain. You will recoil from it in the naked bodies of rural folk, the vicious fleas of even the best hotels, the "outrageous messes" served for dinner, the bleak poverty of farms and tiny towns. But maybe you will come to love it too.

For him it cannot be the same. The landscape too familiar now for that "freshness of surprise which greets you on your first jaunt." His eyes are open to the disturbing evidence of "civilization" -- no,

better call it "foreignism" -- that now tinges the interior. So many Westerners at Hakone, with its mountain lake, forests and hot springs, that the landlords have become parasites, "bleeding their victims by . . . extortion." Beyond the mountains, people are more traditional, deferential, honest, but in stores you find foreign goods; in native inns, new petroleum lamps; on trash heaps, beer bottles. In Shidzuoka, Ed Clark provides plenty of good hospitality and disillusioned views of both the Japanese people and their government. Nearby, lives the last Shogun. He shows no interest in forsaking a quiet retirement to give an exclusive interview to the Western press.

Kyoto on July 26. Three days to absorb a thousand years of history. For him, the "Paris of Japan," with no elaboration. For her, an Asia of dreams at last made real. Throngs of refined-looking people in gorgeous robes, laugh and chat as if on "perpetual holiday." Streets that are broad, clean, laid out in a familiar checkerboard. Houses tidy and elegant; shops full of exquisite crafts never seen in the capital. The past lives, breathes, swallows you. Solemn Nijo castle wholly intact; this room where the Shogun held audiences, beneath that carved ceiling, between these walls covered with gilded paper. The rambling palace where Mikados dwelt for centuries in "luxury and idleness," surrounded by "numerous wives," the "sacred countenance" hidden from the gaze of the vulgar. Up on Higashiyama, Kiyomizu-dera and its tall Chinese pagoda, brooding over the city for eight hundred years; not far below, Sanjusangendo, where thirty-three

thousand images of Buddha return the gaze of the viewer with the blank stare of eternity.

Three days beyond Kyoto to Fukui. On the Lake Biwa steamer, his emotion channels into observation: "Fine views. Sat on deck. Storm of rain. Rock full of white herons." Ashore, she charts the long, thatched villages, the naked children, the women spinning silk, the grand mountain views of "old trees, rocks, & streams." Homecoming is flavored with irony -- the first to welcome them Murata, "Willie's particular friend." Two hectic days of rooms crowded with friends, former students, officials, of presents given and received, of "old scenes revisited" -- the lecture room and lab, stores and homes, the tea houses of Atago Yama. Everything familiar but nothing quite the same: trousers and boots; postal boxes; horse-drawn wagons; gingham umbrellas; a girl's school with instruction in English; Western-style rooms in the homes of the wealthy; neat public water closets in the streets. "Great pleasure" is her phrase for his experience, for feelings he never bothers to record, even for himself.

A week's journey back to the capital through an Asia far older than Kyoto. On the Japan sea coast, no roads for rickshas, danger enough for guards. Porters carry them along steep, narrow paths high above surf beating against rocks, through regions so poor the houses are "mere sheds with mats spread on the earth." Receptions as in the old days -- memories to him, revelations to her: town officers bow heads to the ground; guards shout carts and animals out of the way; peasants kneel silently as they pass. Up into the mountains, lush

country with solid farmhouses, neat bamboo fences, well-tended gardens, then a fifteen hour stage ride from Takasaki back to the capital. For her, no summation, just relief after "24 days in the wilds," and the fine feeling that home "never looked so good, so comfortable, so inviting." For him, no description, no summation. About this journey nothing but silence for the rest of his life.

Action followed by reaction. That is the inevitable pattern; that is what leads to the end of Griffis in Japan. Tradition reasserts itself in mid-1873 with a revival in the custom of men wearing two swords. At the same time, the mask of government begins to slip -- many reforms turn out to be no more than "superficial," or mere rhetoric aimed at placating foreign governments. Despite edicts to the contrary, prostitution continues to flourish openly and the government to draw "great revenue" from it. The separation of sexes in public baths proves to be only symbolic, often no more than two separate entrances to a common tub divided by an imaginary line. Backsliding on religious matters too. One hundred villages in Echizen rise in revolt against the abolition of anti-Christian edicts; Mombusho, the Ministry of Education, issues a notice "forbidding students of the colleges to attend Christian churches"; the government elevates Tokugawa Iyeyasu, founder of the last Shogunate, to the status of kami, or Shinto god.

All this can be handled gracefully enough in print. Yes, things are not always what they seem; yes, progress can ebb as well as flow. That the "great advance" of 1872 has given way to "positive regression"

is regrettable, but no doubt temporary. These sentiments come from on high, from a man who is judicious, tolerant, understanding. Such a posture can only last until the moment when reaction strikes home.

July 15th: "Was notified today that my contract would not be renewed." To say this changes his point of view, to say he is hurt, is to indulge in a serious understatement. Twenty-five years later, rage still colors his description of events surrounding the termination. The government may claim merely to be giving the six-month notice called for in his original contract (the three years will be up in January, 1874) but he has another picture to show the world -- a stark etching, black on white, with Griffis nailed to a cross.

The lines are drawn when Mombusho, in June, decides to enforce the observation of Japanese holidays. For foreign teachers this will mean a day of rest every sixth day and the necessity of teaching on most Sundays. Suggestions of a voluntary shift by Westerners are underscored with a threat -- in the future all new contracts will carry an anti-Sunday clause. Since Griffis is a self-professed "strict Sabbatarian," this move alone should count him out. But that is to expect a rational response to an assertion of power which threatens his aspirations. Easier it is to fly into a rage and charge "breach of faith" and "acts of treachery" on the part of power-hungry officials; easier to organize a protest by all the English-speaking teachers "against the changing of rest days; easier then to see the dismissal as the government's way of getting rid of serious opposition.

The martyr can contradict himself. Griffis will later claim a quick descent from the cross: "I dropped a note to Mr. Iwakura, the Junior Prime Minister, simply stating the case. The matter was very quickly settled to my satisfaction. Another position of equal honor and emolument for three years was offered me, which I declined with thanks." Were this so, one might wonder at the rage. But the truth is quite different. For the next six months he struggles ferociously to stay on in Japan. He wrangles with Mombusho over legal technicalities, claiming that since the college is not the unopened Polytechnic School, his contract remains unfulfilled. He writes letters to the local press, complains to the American Minister, pesters influential friends and officials like Mori Arinori, Iwakura Tomomi, and Matsudaira Shungaku, and begs Verbeck to intercede. When nothing seems to move the government, his moods vary. Petulance: "I wouldn't stay in their service long if they begged me to do so." Resignation: "The influences here are against me." Fantasies of sweet revenge: "I shall return to my own country and tell everyone that a contract with Mombusho is worth nothing."

Not until the turn of the New Year is the matter settled with a simple six-month extension of the contract. For a man who considers himself the second most important professor in the realm, this tiny victory tastes very much like defeat. Rationalizations are easy to voice. High principles have been defended; career opportunities have been enhanced. Proud he is to claim "I would not work regularly on Sundays for any amount of money"; happy he is to predict that seeking a

book publisher at home in person has great advantages. But good reasons never banish pain. How wretched that his "life's best fruits and toil" have been repaid with "ingratitude and neglect." The experience feels familiar. First Ellen, then Japan -- he makes the equation. Both are examples of "unrequited love"; both full of lessons impossible to learn. Once again he must be two people, must divide that which should be indivisible. His deep feeling for the nation must now be selective rather than unconditional. The result: anger, passion, anguish: "I don't want to say hard things of the Japanese people. I love them, I love my students, but the petty-souled potentates in office in Japan -- these men shall feel the lash of my pen for years to come."

Don't leave the wrong impression -- rage and the desire for revenge are never more than part of him. Even during the wrangle with Mombushuo and the six-month extension, life continues with the same duties, walks, visits, conversations, dinners, faces, colleagues, newspapers, lectures, prayers, issues. Tokyo remains the same city, detestable on ripe summer afternoons when the streets choke with dust and the odor of privies, lovable on hazy autumn mornings that "spiritualize" the landscape and can bring a Biblical vision -- "crimson masses of maples" glowing against white castle walls "like bushes on Mount Horeb." Moods are the same as always, up, down and in between -- annoyance when his sisters neglect to write, pride when articles appear in print, tender sadness when a favorite student grows

ill and dies, impatience when Maggie longs too vocally for home, delight when Ed Clark comes to the capital and moves into their house. Money problems remain the same; fear of arriving home penniless leads to new ventures -- an annotated tourist map of the capital, guidebooks for Yokohama and Tokyo. Peace with the inevitable comes gradually. When a Kyoto college in September 1873 offers a post as Professor of Chemistry, it takes him three days to decline; when Horace Capron, in May of the following year, wants him to stay on as a private secretary he refuses immediately.

Don't leave the impression that this is all, that you now know Griffis in Tokyo. Remember everything he sees, hears, smells and feels, but never commits to paper; remember all those other details that you have no space to capture. And how about the experiences that don't quite fit in, those odd moments, important images that can suggest more than words?

January 1, 1873. Midmorning. Griffis walks along Go-jikken michi, past the shrine to Inari, the fox-god, through the great gate Omon and into the Yoshiwara. No girls in cages this day. The elegant brothels of Nakano-cho, the main street, are hung with New Year decorations -- bright green blinds, boiled red lobsters, branches of pine and bamboo, oranges and white rice cakes. A holiday crowd, young girls in bright silk, their parents and brothers in more subdued colors, all here to see the annual promenade of grand courtesans. His aim as well, but unfortunately the "procession" will not begin until

two o'clock, just when he must meet with other foreign faculty members at Mombusho for special presentation to the Mikado. Does he follow native tradition and look wistfully at Mi-kaeri yanagi -- "gazing back willow" -- on his way out? All we have is the single word:

"Disappointed."

Griffis blows into the house, tanned and bearded, blue eyes alight with a strange joy. A week alone, exploring the provinces of Kadzusa and Awa -- has cured a serious "fit of anti-Caucasianism." He had encountered Nichiren pilgrims, stayed atop Mount Kanozan, enjoyed the "sweet simplicity" of ryōkan, thrived on the native diet: raw fish, radish, leeks, mushrooms, sea-weed, tofu, foods that once tasted like "starch or sawdust." The pride that once lined "his ailmentary canal" is gone; to him, "a Japanese meal tastes very much as it does to [a] native."

Griffis walks inside the walls of the old castle. You can find him here often, in seasons of mud or snow, under sun, clouds or the autumn moon. From the ramparts he gazes at the vast sprawl of black roofs that are the city. In overgrown courtyards he strolls in a "meditative" mood, never committing thoughts to paper. But one November day at the height of the conflict with Mombusho the image of Fuji and the twist of trees and dying vines and the sharp air pierce him with the fullness of the moment; "Glorious weather, fine health, high spirits."

March 19, 1874. Four months left to go. Griffis at his desk just before bedtime. A typical day. Cool and clear. Breakfast in Yokohama, two hours of teaching, two hours at a church meeting, an evening working on the book. His mind is full of sunrise, the "golden flushed horizon and silver sparkling ocean" seen from that too familiar train. Everything feels fine: "Lovely day, beautiful Japan."

The end is like everything else -- he refuses to reveal what you really want to know. Not who he sees or what he does but how he feels. To read between these lines you must know him well. A good imagination helps.

"Saturday, July 18, 1874. Up early, took 8:15 train to Yokohama. Busy all day, winding up affairs, etc. Evening, tea at Mrs. Pruyn's, calls on Mr. & Mrs. Stone, Miller, Hepburn, Syle, etc. Took sampan, and on Colorado at 10:15. Many friends on ship to see us off. Up till 12:45. Night dark, phosphorescence splendid, lights in harbor beautiful.

"Sunday, July 19. Loading tea all night. Steam up and off at 6 A.M. Sky cloudy and Fuji not visible. Down the bay, past Cape King, and due east from Oshima. Read etc. all day."