

## SCIENTIFIC AGRICULTURE, HEALTH AND GARDENING: JAPAN, NEW ZEALAND AND BELLA AND FREDERIC TRUBY KING

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The most important lesson the Japanese had to teach Western nations was not so much how to rear crops as [how] to rear human beings.

—Frederic Truby King, *West Coast Times*<sup>1</sup>

Together with Bella King (1860–1927; from 1925, Lady), Frederic Truby King (1858–1938; from 1925, Sir)—autodidact and controversial health reformer—is remembered today as the founder of New Zealand’s Plunket Society. Largely forgotten, however, is the Kings’ connection to Japan and its impact on their ideas about health, scientific agriculture, and gardening in New Zealand. This article sheds light on these new aspects of Asia–New Zealand connections through a case study of the Kings’ visit to Japan in 1904. Their visit demonstrates that, for some Europeans, *Japonisme* extended well beyond an aesthetic interest in specific Japanese objects, into a sophisticated intellectual engagement with aspects of its culture, gardens, and health policies.

The four months Bella and Truby King spent in Japan in 1904 passed in a whirlwind of activity, with visits to gardens and nurseries, shrines and shops, and many other places of interest. With the energy of a whirling dervish, King raced round interviewing professors of agriculture and visiting hospitals, making notes on Japanese diet, infant welfare, and agricultural practices, taking photos of infants and Japanese life and, with Bella, obtaining seeds and Japanese objects. The influence of Japan continued in New Zealand. The Kings brought back Japanese plants and concepts of Japanese gardens that they introduced, first, to their coastal property in Karitane (coastal Otago) and, later and more extensively, to Melrose, their “eyrie” atop the Wellington suburb of the same name. Almost immediately on his return to New Zealand too, King delivered a series of public lectures—on Japanese scientific agriculture, nutrition, and infant care and their applicability to New Zealand—that exemplify the influence of his Japanese sojourn. The subsequent development of King’s wide-ranging and influential programmes of infant care and public health and their relationship to his observations in Japan deserve

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1 *West Coast Times*, 28 July 1905, 2.

further attention. Together with the Kings' interest in Japanese gardening, they hint at the complexity of intellectual influences bearing upon New Zealand thinkers of the Edwardian period. And they hint at the very real global problem modernity posed to policy-makers at that time—of how to organize state and society effectively and efficiently while at the same time, as they understood it, introducing aspects of new technology without losing pre-modern values.

### Historical Views of the Transmission of Health Ideas

By and large, studies of the transmission of both medical ideas and medical practices in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries centre on the impact of western medicine on non-western societies, on, in other words, a one-way traffic of ideas.<sup>2</sup> Scholars of Japan's medical history, for instance, situate western medicine's impact on Japan through examining the application of German medical practices and educational models within the broader reforming policies initiated under the Meiji (1868–1912) and later.<sup>3</sup> In New Zealand, scholars similarly focus on the impact of European and North American models.<sup>4</sup> The case study of the Kings, however, reveals a more complicated picture of the exchange of medical ideas. Japan/New Zealand medical exchanges demonstrate the increasingly interconnected world of the late-nineteenth century and, not least, the different models and examples policymakers drew upon in shaping national health policy.<sup>5</sup> Japan assumed relevance for the Kings and others because its project of state-sponsored healthcare and its attempt at rapid modernization, both inspired by North

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- 2 For a representative group, see Mark Harrison, *Public Health in British India: Anglo-Indian Preventive Medicine, 1859–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Deepak Kumar, ed., *Disease and Medicine in India: A Historical Overview* (New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2001); Anil Kumar, *Medicine and the Raj: British Medical Policy in India, 1835–1911* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998); Ruth Rogaski, *Hygienic Modernity: Meanings of Health and Disease in Treaty-Port China* (Berkeley: University of California, 2004). Exceptions include the impact of tropical diseases on the emergence of tropical medicine. See David Arnold, ed., *Warm Climates and Western Medicine* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996).
  - 3 See, for instance, the following English-language titles: Morris Low, *Science and the Building of a New Japan* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Sabine Frühstück, *Colonizing Sex: Sexology and Social Control in Modern Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Margaret Powell and Masahira Anesaki, *Health Care in Japan* (London: Routledge, 1990).
  - 4 Derek A. Dow, *Safeguarding the Public Health: A History of the New Zealand Department of Health* (Wellington: Victoria University Press in association with the Ministry of Health and with the assistance of the Historical Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, 1995); Derek A. Dow, *Maori Health and Government Policy, 1840–1940* (Wellington: Victoria University Press in association with the Historical Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, 1999); Linda Bryder, ed., *A Healthy Country: Essays on the Social History of Medicine in New Zealand* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 1991).
  - 5 C.A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World: Global Connections and Comparisons, 1780–1914* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004).

American and European models, resonated with the challenges facing New Zealand policymakers at the same time. How could a country rapidly industrialize and urbanize without suffering from low-birth rates or declining moral standards? In this context, Japan's model fuelled Truby King's passionate arguments for the guiding light of science to be shined on society's ills. Research into the role of Japan as a conduit for the introduction of western ideas—not least medical ones, as Ruth Rogaski has shown in her book, *Hygienic Modernity: Meanings of Health and Disease in Treaty-Port China*—is largely under-developed, unlike research on the influence of Japan's culture. For New Zealand, then, Japan served as a successful model of what modern health reform could achieve in a similarly sized country facing many of the same problems associated with rapid modernization.

Excepting a short reference in Linda Bryder's recent history of Plunket, scholars have largely ignored the influence of King's visit to Japan on the development of his health policies in New Zealand.<sup>6</sup> Most scholarship instead places the trajectory of Truby King's ideas within western medical influences. This is because, first, there is a clearly established link between King's ideas and those from Britain and North America.<sup>7</sup> Second, I suggest, the reasons are to do with the greater accessibility of Truby King's published writings and archival material relating to Plunket than his writing on Japan. Much of King's enthusiasm for Japan is evident in newspaper reports of the time, as well as in archival material relating to Japan—in other words, in material not specifically classified as relating to either health or the Plunket Society but which nonetheless relates to both.<sup>8</sup> By focusing on the Kings' interests in Japan as demonstrated by newspaper articles and archival sources, this article brings together related, but hitherto ignored, aspects of Truby King's interests that together add perspectives and deeper understandings of the genesis of Truby King's health ideas and of the interrelationships between his ideas about Japan, health, scientific agriculture, and gardening.

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6 Linda Bryder, *A Voice for Mothers: The Plunket Society and Infant Welfare, 1907–2000* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2003), 15. Only King's first biographer focused on the influence Japan had on King's later health ideas. Mary King, *Truby King the Man: A Biography* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1948), 151.

7 King, *Truby King the Man*; Gordon Parry, *A Fence at the Top: The First 75 Years of the Plunket Society* (Dunedin: Royal New Zealand Plunket Society, 1982); Erik Olssen, "Truby King and the Plunket Society: An Analysis of a Prescriptive Ideology," *New Zealand Journal of History* 15 (1) (1981): 3–23; Philippa Mein Smith, *Maternity in Dispute: New Zealand, 1920–1939* (Wellington: Historical Publications Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, 1986); P.M. Smith, "Truby King in Australia: A Revisionist View of Reduced Infant Mortality," *New Zealand Journal of History* 22 (1) (1988): 23–43; Bryder, *A Voice for Mothers*; Lloyd Chapman, *In a Strange Garden: The Life and Times of Truby King* (Auckland: Penguin, 2003). For instance, in King's "Physiological Economy in the Nutrition of Infants," *New Zealand Medical Journal* 6 (24) (1907): 71–102, he does not mention Japan.

8 On the issues of archival material, see Tony Ballantyne, "Archives, Empires and Histories of Colonialism," *Archifacts: The Journal of the Archives and Records Association of New Zealand* (April 2004): 21–36.

Truby King the gardener and environmentalist is virtually unknown,<sup>9</sup> as is the relationship between health and gardens more broadly.<sup>10</sup> The reason is partly because the partitioning and specialization of knowledge evident since the early twentieth century means people consider religion, science, health, and conservation as separate fields, even though past societies may have viewed them as related.<sup>11</sup> These recent ways of partitioning knowledge have spilled over into the way historians approach the past—historians' values are, after all, reflective of those of the societies of which they are part. Specialization threatens to imperil sideways movement into subfields and make once shallow disciplinary divides yawning chasms. In the landscape of history, practitioners have largely considered health, garden design, and conservation as separate, mutually exclusive territories. Accordingly, health concerns are regarded as belonging to the realm of the medical historian, gardens to the garden historian, and conservation to the environmental historian. By interrogating the *interconnections* between aspects of a person's life that recent sub-disciplinary classifications deem separate, valuable insights into a period are possible, insights that I think more accurately reflect individuals' complex intellectual worlds. Seemingly diverse interests—in gardening, scientific agriculture, and health—intersected in the work and thinking of Frederic Truby and Bella King.

A case study of the Kings' Japanese trip facilitates exploration of these intersections, demonstrating Japan's role in supporting King's existing beliefs on welfare and breastfeeding practices gleaned from American and British sources.<sup>12</sup> Truby King's support for Japan and the applicability of its health ideas to New Zealand appeared in a series of lectures in 1905 following his return from Japan in late 1904. At the meeting which founded what eventually became the Plunket Society, King reached for Japanese examples to justify the Society's establishment in New Zealand. Before discussing these and the position of Japan in his gardening and agricultural work, it is first useful to examine Bella and Truby King's trip to Japan in 1904.

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- 9 James Beattie, Jasper M. Heinzen, and John P. Adam, "Japanese Gardens in New Zealand, 1850–1950: Transculturation and Transmission," *Studies in the History of Gardens and Designed Landscapes* 28 (2) (April–June 2008): 219–36; Martin Wilkie, "Truby King the Gardener: 'Commanding an excellent prospect', Part Two," *Gardeners' Chronicle* 6 (February 2009): 23–32.
  - 10 James Beattie, "Colonial Geographies of Settlement: Vegetation, Towns, Disease and Well-Being in Aotearoa/New Zealand, 1830s–1930s," *Environment and History* 14 (4) (November 2008): 583–610.
  - 11 Thomas F. Gieryn, *Cultural Boundaries of Science: Credibility on the Line* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); John Lewis Geddis, *The Landscape of History: How Historians Map the Past* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).
  - 12 On the idea that Japan could provide the west with "lessons," see Robert A. Rosenstone, "Learning from Those 'Imitative' Japanese: Another Side of the American Experience in the Mikado's Empire," *American Historical Review* 85 (3) (June 1980): 572–95.

### *Japonisme*

In May 1904 the Kings received heartening news: the Inspector-General of Mental Hospitals had granted Truby King's request for six months' sick leave from his position as Superintendent of Seacliff Lunatic Asylum (later, Seacliff Mental Hospital, located north of Dunedin). No doubt the permission came as something of a relief to them both as tuberculosis, exhaustion, and overwork frequently laid Truby King low.<sup>13</sup> With the health benefits of travel being widely promoted in medical circles at the time, the Kings' visit to Japan coincided with the visits of several other wealthy and educated New Zealanders and with a period of great western fascination with Japan. For the west, Japan's re-engagement with the world after centuries of relative isolation from the west, coupled with its remarkable "modernization" (and China's apparently terminal imperial decline), stimulated enormous overseas interest in the country, its people, and products. A wealthy minority of westerners could now afford to visit the country as tourists and marvel at its "progress" and people. Even the majority who could not visit Japan could at least know something of its products thanks to the innumerable Japanese goods flooding into the west, some of which were on display in New Zealand's museums and galleries and in several households. Western decorative arts looked to Japan through the assimilation of Japanese arts and crafts into "western" design that became known as *Japonisme*.<sup>14</sup> In its people's interest in Japan and in their demand for Japanese goods, New Zealand was following international trends, ironically at the same time as anxieties about the Japanese military threat in the Pacific were growing.<sup>15</sup>

In 1882, Christchurch's newspaper the *Press* captured that fascination, commenting on the "present tendency... to possess 'something Japanese.'"<sup>16</sup> That "present tendency" proved somewhat less ephemeral than the author had imagined. Demand for Japanese goods continued to grow. Art historian Anna Petersen shows that the annual importation of Japanese goods to New Zealand rose from £95 in 1881 to a staggering £10,393 by 1884.<sup>17</sup> The fascinating research of art historians David Bell and Richard Bullen has also revealed early New Zealand collections of

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13 D. MacGregor to Dr F. Truby King, 19 May 1904, 74C\*AG-007-005/028, Hocken Library (hereafter cited as HL), Dunedin.

14 Ayako Ono, *Japonisme in Britain: Whistler, Menpes, Henry Hornel and Nineteenth-Century Japan* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003); Lionel Lambourne, *Japonisme: Cultural Crossings between Japan and the West* (New York: Phaidon, 2005); Charles Ferrall, Paul Millar, and Keren Smith, eds., *East by South: China in the Australasian Imagination* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2005).

15 In New Zealand, far greater anxieties attached to Chinese migration than Japanese. For the political debate on Japanese migration, see Neville Bennett, "White Discrimination against Japan: Britain, the Dominions and the United States, 1908–1928," *New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies* 3 (2) (December 1999): 91–105.

16 *Press*, 6 November 1882, quoted in Anna Petersen, "'Signs of higher life': A Cultural History of Domestic Interiors of New Zealand c.1814–1914" (PhD thesis, University of Otago, 1998), 105.

17 Anna Petersen, *New Zealanders at Home: A Cultural History of Domestic Interiors, 1814–1914* (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 2001), 85.

Japanese prints dating from the nineteenth century that add new understandings of New Zealanders' obsession with Japan.<sup>18</sup>

Accompanying the demand for things was a demand for knowledge. From the late nineteenth century, many articles on Japan appeared in New Zealand journals and newspapers. Some came from overseas publications; others from New Zealanders who had visited Japan; and one or two even from sources directly translated from Japanese. Popular topics included discussion of Japanese arts, such as gardening, flower displays, and the making of cloisonné, as well as debates about Japan's modernization and Japanese migration, coupled with anxieties about its growing military strength and successes. Equally fascinating was the employment of Japanese designs in theatre and music and their use in advertising in New Zealand. In some cases, fanciful Japanese characters were employed in part of the advertisement; in others, where these could not be found, characters purporting to be Japanese were used!<sup>19</sup> Japanese naval training vessels visited New Zealand first in 1882 and relatively regularly thereafter, further helping to raise the profile of (and interest in) their country. Indeed, in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century newspapers, it is not uncommon to find reports of Japanese-themed parties or to discover images of "kimono"-wearing Europeans playing "Japanese" games.

By the 1900s several wealthier New Zealand men and women were engaging at an intellectual level with Japan. Some had visited Japan, a few even settling there. Frank Major of Waimate (South Canterbury) and Alfred Aldrich provide examples of those who spent considerable periods of time in Japan before they settled in New Zealand. Major established a trading business in Ōsaka in 1868, worked as a correspondent for the *Hiogo* [sic] *News*, and served as a Secretary of the Ōsaka Municipal Council. Following the death of his Japanese wife, Major and his three children returned to New Zealand in 1878.<sup>20</sup> As a civil engineer Aldrich helped to develop Japan's railway system. After twenty-five years there, he settled in New Zealand in 1897, becoming Japan's first honorary consul to New Zealand. In this role, Aldrich "cut an impressive figure at official functions in Wellington," Ken McNeil

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18 David Bell, "Framing the Land in Japan and New Zealand," *Journal of New Zealand Studies* 15 (December 2008): 60–73; Richard Bullen, with David Bell, Geraldine Lummis, and Rachel Payne, *Pleasure and Play in Edo Japan* (Christchurch: Canterbury Museum; University of Canterbury, 2009); James Beattie, "Japan-New Zealand Cultural Contacts, 1880s–1920," in *63 Chapters to Know New Zealand*, ed. Machiko Aoyagi (Tōkyō: Akashi Shoten, 2008), 271–74.

19 See, for instance, front cover, *Ladies Mirror: The Fashionable Ladies' Journal of New Zealand* 1 (4) (2 October 1922); "Japanese Flower Festivals," *Star*, 27 July 1901, 2; "Japanese Art: How Cloisonne is Made," *Star*, 2 June 1900, 3; Advertisement: D. Hay & Son, *New Zealand Farmer* (May 1896): 1.

20 Eric Hardisty Thompson, Papers, in "Early Japanese Migrants and Visitors to New Zealand (a)," Reference No. 2001-008-116, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington; Ken McNeil, "Encounters, 1860s to 1940s," in *Japan and New Zealand, 150 Years*, ed. Roger Peren (Palmerston North: New Zealand Centre for Japanese Studies, in association with the Historical Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington, 1999), 24–25.

has observed, “dressed in his formal consul’s uniform complete with the medals and sword conferred on him by the Japanese government.”<sup>21</sup>

These individuals gained a far more extensive knowledge of both language and people than the majority of people who encountered Japan through published sources or objects. For the two dozen or so Europeans from New Zealand who had visited Japan by the early 1900s, knowledge of, the collection of objects from, and travel to Japan marked their class and social aspirations, much in the same way as did other activities like the establishment of art galleries, museums, and scientific, musical, and literary societies.

Typical of a number of visitors to Japan, Jessie Rhodes and her husband (and later politician) Heaton spent three months on their honeymoon there July to September 1891. The Rhodes followed a well-trodden tourist trail in Japan: Jessie kept a diary, and she and her husband brought back a variety of products from their visit, from chests, cushions, and paper lanterns to sake bottles, bowls, and a kimono.<sup>22</sup> Less typical were the interests of L.D. Nathan, a merchant who had brought his trading ship to Yokohama twice in the early 1880s. In 1902 he presented a Japanese shrine to Auckland Museum, one of several such shrines still held in New Zealand’s museums.<sup>23</sup> For others, visits to Japan satisfied artistic interest or scientific curiosity. The photographer George Chance made a photographic tour of Japan in the early decades of the twentieth century, while the collector and medical doctor Thomas Morland Hocken (1836–1910) holidayed in Japan twice (1900 and 1904). Hocken visited Tōkyō’s Imperial University, regarding it as “a marvel” that compared “well with any other University in the world” and using his connections there to enquire about scientific agriculture and forestry in Japan and, it seems, to obtain Japanese prints. Hocken subsequently encouraged links between Japan and the Australian state agricultural departments of Victoria and Tasmania, and delivered a few lectures in Australia and New Zealand about Japanese culture and science.<sup>24</sup>

### The Kings: Travelling to Japan

In visiting Japan the Kings followed a relatively well-trodden tourist path. Weighted down with guidebooks, including Basil Hall Chamberlain’s *Things Japanese* and

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21 McNeil, “Encounters,” 26; “The History of Early Relations between Japan and New Zealand: The First Honorary Consul of Japan in New Zealand,” in Thompson, Papers.

22 Edwina Palmer and Geoffrey W. Rice, “A Honeymoon in Meiji Japan: The Diary of Jessie Rhodes,” *Journal of New Zealand Studies* 4 (December 1997): 64–94.

23 *Auckland Weekly News*, 16 January 1902, 9.

24 Newspaper clipping from Australian newspaper supplied to me by Dr Donald Kerr; E.G. Duffus to Dr Hocken, 12 December 1904, Dr Thomas Morland Hocken Papers, Correspondence, MS-0451-020, HL; Thomas Sabret to Dr Hocken, 12 December 1904, Hocken Papers.



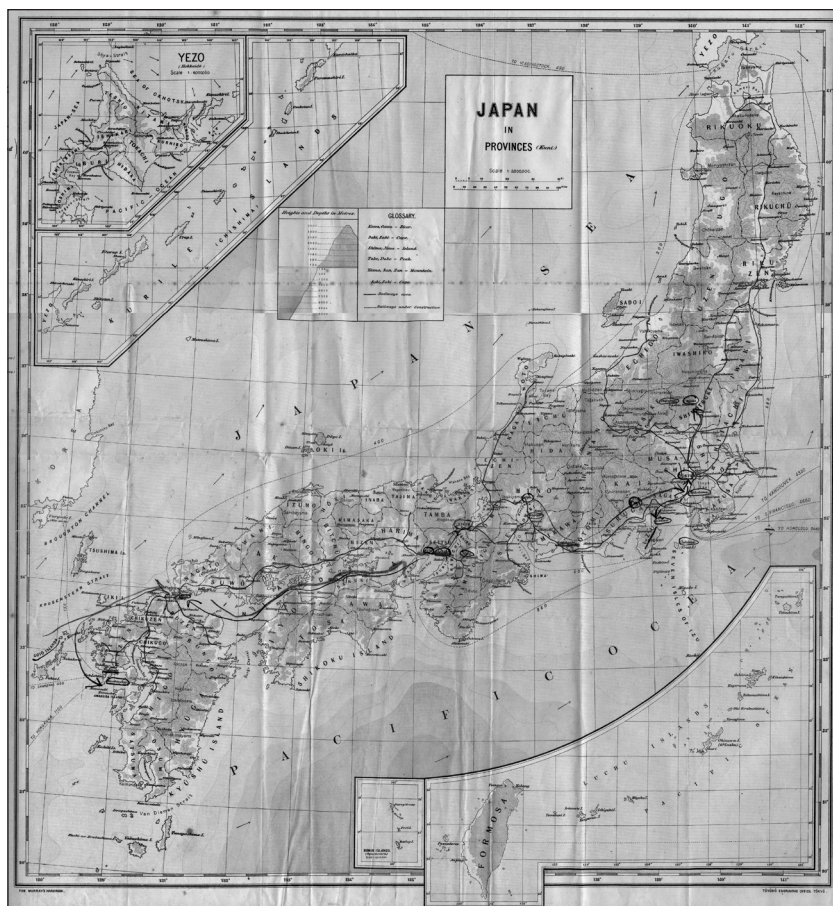


Figure 1. Map of Truby & Bella King's tour of Japan. (Hocken Library, Dunedin, AG-007-005/028.)

possibly *A Japanese Miscellany* (1901),<sup>25</sup> Bella and Truby set off from Lyttelton on 8 August 1904, changing to the *Chingtu* in Sydney for the longer leg of the journey. After going via Hong Kong and Manila, they landed at Kobe on 22 September, leaving Japan on 10 November.<sup>26</sup> Their travel route is reproduced in Figure 1. The account of their

25 King's copy was Basil Hall Chamberlain, *Things Japanese, Being Notes on Various Subjects Connected with Japan for the Use of Travellers and Others*, 3rd ed. (London: John Murray, 1898). Although Mary King notes that King took with him Lafcadio Hearn's *Kokoro* (1896), this is unlikely as King ordered this work in 1933. For this particular order, see W.A. Foyle to Sir Truby King, 24 April 1933, MS-1783/046, HL.

26 Bella King, Diary 1903–1904, AG 7 5-35, HL.



travel comes from three main sources: Bella King's appointment diary, her notebook (with some entries made by Truby King), and transcriptions of letters Bella sent to a friend in Dunedin (reproduced in the biography of Truby King by his daughter, Mary King).<sup>27</sup> Sadly, as far as I am aware, the many photographs Truby King records as taking do not survive.

### Japan and Modernization

At the time of the Kings' visit, Japan was undergoing a remarkable period of change under the reform-minded Meiji rulers. The Meiji sought to modernize the country using western science and technology but ultimately to preserve Japanese culture through selectively adopting and adapting western ideas and practices.<sup>28</sup> Visiting Japan would have presented a fascinating opportunity to observe a country so long closed to western observation. Like so many other foreigners, the Kings used their trip to reflect on "progress" not only within Japan but also within their own country. While heavily orientalized, Truby King greatly admired Japan. Taking pains to point out the various aspects in which Japan surpassed New Zealand, King believed that his country could learn from the experiences of Japan. Lurking in the background of King's analysis—and in the analyses of so many other observers of Japan from both within and without that society—were the burning issues of the day: in a world dominated by Spencerian visions of the survival of the fittest, which nations would prevail and which would fall?<sup>29</sup>

An enthusiastic underliner and commenter in books, King agreed emphatically with the analysis of Chamberlain in *Things Japanese* that "Japan will be *fit* for world-empire."<sup>30</sup> He echoed these sentiments at Choral Hall, Dunedin, in July 1905, contrasting "the want of nerve and virility displayed by British troops" during the Boer War (1899–1902) with "the higher ideals of conduct and the greater physical vitality of the Japanese."<sup>31</sup> The Japanese were, he declared later, "the youngest . . . most primitive and the most virile" of nations.<sup>32</sup> And although their Japanese sojourn was ostensibly for relaxation, Truby took advantage of any opportunity to pursue his interests in

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27 *Ibid.*; "Notes, Photographs and Mementoes of a Trip to Japan by Truby King," 74C\*AG-007-005/028, HL; King, *Truby King the Man*, 116–49.

28 For a recent review of Meiji modernization, see Alistair Swale, *The Meiji Restoration: Monarchism, Mass Communication and Conservative Revolution* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

29 Masako Gavin, *Shiga Shigetaka, 1863–1927: The Forgotten Enlightener* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2001). On the importance of such Darwinian ideas, see Georg G. Iggers and Q. Edward Wang, eds., with contributions from Supriya Mukherjee, *A Global History of Modern Historiography* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2008), 128–56.

30 For quotation and comments, see Chamberlain, *Things Japanese*, 79; the copy held in the Otago Medical School Library basement (viewed November 2006).

31 *Otago Witness*, 12 July 1905, 81.

32 *Evening Post*, 31 July 1905, 2.

gardening, scientific agriculture, and human health, fascinations husband and wife shared. The following pages focus, in turn, on each of these interests, demonstrating the way these ideas were interconnected in the thinking of the Kings.

### Japanese Gardens and Plants

In Japan, the Kings visited many gardens, collecting seeds of several Japanese species.<sup>33</sup> In mid-October 1904, Bella found Sapporo Beer Garden “very beautiful with quaint pines, stone lanterns and bridges.” While Bella admired its “little peninsulas and stone steps” that led “up the slopes” and the “great many little paths and many landings,” Truby carefully photographed the area.<sup>34</sup> On a subsequent visit to a private garden in Nujako, Truby returned to take further photographs.<sup>35</sup> As well as visiting gardens and parks, the Kings took every opportunity to obtain the seeds of Japanese plants. At a private garden in Awata, for instance, they “gathered some maple seed from the best trees.”<sup>36</sup> On another occasion, entranced by the autumnal beauty of Lake Cuzenji, its colouring “quite beyond description,” they “sealed the [collected] seeds in separate envelopes, to plant on our return to New Zealand.”<sup>37</sup> The couple also visited the famous nurseries of Yokohama, placing orders for “some plants to be freighted back to New Zealand.”<sup>38</sup> Figure 2, although taken from a travelogue of a New Zealander visiting Japan in 1917, depicts the typical garden scenes which interested foreigners, including probably the Kings.

Japanese plants and elements of Japanese garden design enlivened the Kings’ property in the small Otago coastal settlement of Karitane, through the Kings’ adaptation of Japanese garden aesthetics and plants to a New Zealand context. At Karitane, the Kings “built stepping stones and Japanese pergolas” and planted “the crab apples and maple trees” either collected or ordered while in Japan.<sup>39</sup> The Kings’ interest in Japanese gardens formed part of their wider fascination with Japanese aesthetics. Along with seeds, they returned to New Zealand with a sizeable collection of other purchases from

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33 On other garden visits, note Bella King, Diary, 8 October and 2–3 November 1904, in King, *Truby King the Man*, 132, 141–42.

34 Bella King’s Diary for 24 October 1904, *Ibid.*, 138.

35 Bella King’s Diary for 3 November 1904, *Ibid.*, 142.

36 *Ibid.*

37 This was at Lake Chuzenji, now part of Nikko National Park. B.C. King to C., 17 October 1904, in *Ibid.*, 136.

38 B.C. King to C., 14 October 1904, in *Ibid.*, 135. From the later nineteenth century, Yokohama nurseries became an important source of many overseas Japanese plants in North America, Europe, and New Zealand. See Wybe Kuitert, “Japonaiserie in London and The Hague: A History of the Japanese Gardens at Shepherd’s Bush (1910) and Clingendael (c.1915),” *Garden History* 30 (2) (Winter 2002): 231; Thomas A. Brown, “Japanese Plants: The Yokohama Connection,” *Eden: Journal of the California Garden and Landscape History Society* 11 (2) (Summer 2008): 8–12.

39 King, *Truby King the Man*, 150.



Rest House on mountains  
near Hakone.



Gardens, Kyoto,



Private Garden, Kyoto,



Iris & Fish Ponds, Kyoto,



Gardens, Kyoto,

Figure 2. Private Garden, Kyoto. (Henry Augustus Jull Family Papers, 1917, page from Scrapbook, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, MSX-7842-2.)

Japan. In their luggage, suits for King vied for space with wall hangings and pictures. Two sets of lacquer tables, packets of crockery, a brace of lanterns, and many other items fitted into their considerably increased luggage on their return leg.<sup>40</sup> Extending such aesthetic interests and influenced by her interpretation of Japanese customs, after their return Bella eschewed the cluttered displays of ornaments characteristic of late Victorian and Edwardian fashions, adopting instead the minimalist presentation of only one or two items at a time.<sup>41</sup>

The Japanese garden plants and design the Kings introduced into New Zealand contributed to the wider aesthetic fashion for *Japonisme* evident outside Japan from the late-nineteenth century. Western plant enthusiasts eagerly vied with each other to obtain the newest, the most beautiful, or the rarest Japanese species. The availability in Europe, North America, and Australasia of large numbers of Asian species—coupled with the technology to transport living specimens successfully—came at an opportune moment, contributing to, while simultaneously benefiting from, the growth in middle-class purchasing power, increased leisure time, and the rise of gardening as a respectable pastime.<sup>42</sup> While such economic factors impacted on New Zealand garden tastes slightly later than in Europe, New Zealand collectors were exhibiting considerable interest in Japanese—and other Asian—species from the 1870s and, for a select few, slightly earlier.<sup>43</sup> By the 1870s catalogues produced by nurseries around New Zealand show that many Japanese varieties were stocked.<sup>44</sup> As a journalist commented in 1903, “Everyone knows the obligations under which we lie to Japan for some of our most esteemed flowers, such as chrysanthemum and lilium.” “More recently,” he continued, “their claim has been extended to fruit.”<sup>45</sup> Evidence from this period points to the multiple sources of Japanese species coming into New Zealand (via North America, Australia, Britain, as well as sometimes directly from Japan). It also illustrates the cultural significance of such rare objects to collectors.<sup>46</sup> Rarity conferred value on

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40 “Notes, Photographs and Mementoes.” The National Office of the Plunket Society has a couple of artworks the Kings collected while in Japan. Trish O’Hagan, personal communication, 28 November 2010.

41 King, *Truby King the Man*, 150.

42 See Anne Wilkinson, *The Victorian Gardener: The Growth of Gardening and the Floral World* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2006); Todd Longstaffe-Gowan, “Gardening and the Middle Classes,” in *London’s Pride: The Glorious History of the Capital’s Gardens*, ed. Mireille Galinou (London: Anaya Publishers, 1990), 122–33; Brent Elliott, “Commercial Horticulture in Victorian London,” in *London’s Pride*, 168–79.

43 See Beattie et al., “Japanese Gardens in New Zealand.” See also James Beattie, “‘The Empire of the Rhododendron’: Reorienting New Zealand Garden History,” in Tom Brooking and Eric Pawson, eds., *Making a New Land: Environmental Histories of New Zealand* (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2013), 241–57, 365–67.

44 On which, see Beattie et al., “Japanese Gardens in New Zealand.”

45 “Garden Notes: Fanciful and Practical,” *Otago Witness*, 1 July 1903, in “Cutting Book: Garden History, AG105,” Otago Settlers Museum, Dunedin.

46 James Beattie, “Acclimatisation and the ‘Europeanisation’ of New Zealand, 1830s–1920s?,” *ENNZ: Environment, Nature and New Zealand* 3 (1) (February 2008): 1–25.

an object and prestige on its owner. So, in this sense, the Kings' interest in Japanese plants followed the wider fashion for *Japonisme*, but also extended in important ways the collection of fine objects from that region to that of the plant kingdom.<sup>47</sup>

Along with Japanese plants, a growing trend for constructing European interpretations of Japanese gardens in the west also dates from the late-nineteenth century. This came about thanks to several popular accounts of that country's gardens. Most famously, the British architect Josiah Conder (1852–1920) published *Landscape Gardening in Japan* (1893). Conder's work inspired the construction of several Japanese gardens in England at the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>48</sup> The 1910 Japan–British Exhibition also made an impact on visitors. Many New Zealanders visited the Exhibition's famous “Japanese” garden that sparked so many imitations around the world.<sup>49</sup> Regular visits of Japanese naval training vessels to New Zealand also shaped Antipodean fashions. The naval visits began in the 1880s and grew more elaborate over time as the size and number of vessels visiting the colony increased. Crews staged ornate “at homes,” miniature displays of Japanese culture, ranging from martial arts contests and musical recitals to the portrayal, in miniature, of Japanese gardens and many of its famous landscapes.<sup>50</sup> Considered in a global context, the Kings' interpretation of Japanese garden aesthetics in New Zealand represented a very early aspect of *Japonisme*, one which predated the craze for Japanese gardens sparked by the 1910 Exhibition.

What inspired the construction of their garden at “Kings Cliff,” Karitane, on the Huriawa Peninsula, once a significant Kāi Tahu pa site, more latterly an onshore whaling station, and since the Kings' time a sleepy holiday village?<sup>51</sup> On Truby King's return to New Zealand, for instance, he publicly applauded the Japanese “natural genius for gardening.”<sup>52</sup> My hunch is that the Kings used the photographs of Japanese gardens Truby took on their trip to Japan to model Karitane's redevelopment. Sadly, there are few other direct clues to its development. Research on the remnants of King's library—now held in the basement of the University of Otago's Medical Library—confirms that, of the Japanese guidebooks that the Kings likely took with them to Japan, only one,

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47 Bullen et al., *Pleasure and Play in Edo Japan*.

48 Setsu Tachibana, Stephen Daniels, and Charles Watkins, “Japanese Gardens in Edwardian Britain: Landscape and Transculturation,” *Journal of Historical Geography* 30 (2004): 371–84; Nicola Shulman, *A Rage for Rock Gardening: The Story of Reginald Farrer, Gardener, Writer and Plant Collector* (London: Short Books, 2003); Kuitert, “Japonaiserie in London and The Hague.”

49 Beattie et al., “Japanese Gardens in New Zealand,” 220–21.

50 See Ken McNeil, “Japanese Naval Visits” (unpublished paper). I thank the author for sharing this with me.

51 While a New Zealand newspaper reported King's “disappointment with what he had seen of private gardens in Japan—their small size and the dwarfed appearance of the trees and shrubs in them somewhat spoiling their general effect” (*Otago Witness*, 12 July 1905, 82), this seems unlikely.

52 *Evening Post*, 20 July 1905, 4.

Chamberlain's, mentions Japanese gardening.<sup>53</sup> Quite possibly King would have read that passage, but if it had been of such importance I believe he would have written in the book or underlined passages in it, a common practice for him. No such marginalia clutters up the section on gardens in Chamberlain's work. Nor have I found any record of King purchasing books on Japanese garden-design soon after their return to New Zealand: as far as I can ascertain, he never, for instance, possessed Conder's *Landscape Gardening in Japan*.<sup>54</sup> Instead, the Karitane garden seems likely to have grown out of Truby King's fertile mind and the energizing exposure to Japanese gardens (Figure 3).

As well as impacting on the design and planting out of their Karitane property, the couple's fascination with Japan continued into the 1920s,<sup>55</sup> when, following King's appointment as Director of Child Welfare, a post he took up in 1921, they established Melrose in Wellington. Situated atop the blustery suburb of the same name and overlooking Cook Strait (Figure 4), Wellington Harbour, and the Rimutaka Ranges that climb so abruptly from the sea, the garden and house that the Kings developed are quite extraordinary. A nod to Japan is evident in the planting out of Melrose and in some of its architectural features. For its garden, King ordered many plants from a nursery that specialized in Japanese species: "V.N. Gauntlett & Co., LTD., Japanese Nurseries, Chiddingfold, Surrey."<sup>56</sup> The Kings showed a particular penchant for maples, an interest probably harking back to their admiration of the species in Japan.<sup>57</sup>

Architecturally, Melrose seems to reiterate Mary King's belief that the garden grew out of her father's mind, developing organically in the absence of either a plan or a rough schema.<sup>58</sup> But even if there were no distinct plans, Japanese influences were still at play in King's evolving garden. In its style, Melrose resembles "Lunuganga," the extraordinary Sri Lankan garden designed by Geoffrey Bawa in the 1950s, which David Robson describes as "a landscape that fuses European and Asian traditions of

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53 Chamberlain, *Things Japanese*, 19–21.

54 On his death, King's daughter destroyed some of her father's material, so it is possible that records of this book disappeared in this cull. Nevertheless, the fact that many of his Japanese books are preserved in the Otago Medical School Library lends credence to my argument that King did not possess Conder's work.

55 In the 1930s, King continued to purchase large numbers of books on Japan, ordering, for instance, from Foyle's of London, a number of works by Lafcadio Hearn, as well as no fewer than four biographies of the same individual, in addition to a book on Shinto. See, for instance, W.A. Foyle to Sir Truby King, 24 April 1933, MS-1783/046, HL.

56 Royal New Zealand Plunket Society, Headquarters: Records, "Gardening, Melrose, etc.," part one, MS-1783/083, HL; Barbier & Co. (Orleans), Order No. 7004, 4 January 1928, totalling £7 18d: this included Asian plants, e.g., *Ampelopsis Veitchii* (25), *Paeon*. *Ginko-Nishiki* (1 at a cost of £3); Anon. (written on behalf of TK) to Messrs V.N. Gauntlett & Co., Ltd., Japanese Nurseries, 5 December 1923; "V.N. Gauntlett & Co., LTD., Japanese Nurseries, Chiddingfold, Surrey."

57 B.C. King to C., 17 October 1904, in King, *Truby King the Man*, 136.

58 Mary White to Frank Boffa, Tasmore, South Australia, 10 August 1990, in "Truby King Conservation & Management Plan," JOB # 9047, 9353, Boffa Miskell, Logical House, 190 Willis St., Wellington.





Figure 3. Kings Cliff, Karitane [191?]. (Mrs Anthony White: Photographs of, and relating to, Frederic Truby King, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, No. PAColl-6097-005.)



Figure 4. Home and garden of Sir Truby King in Melrose, Wellington, 1934. (S P Andrew Ltd: Portrait negatives, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, No. 1/1-018464-F.)

garden-making” but which ultimately (quoting Bomarzo of his *sacro bosco*) “resembles itself and nothing else.”<sup>59</sup> Melrose’s high arches, circular openings, and piers, as well as its Chinese-style Moon-Gates and distinctive Japanese pergolas (four in all but since removed), suggest, not only the varied influences King brought into play in developing this extraordinary house and garden, but also the role Japanese aesthetics played in the property’s development (Figure 4). Indeed, King went so far as to purchase some “old-fashioned ship’s lanterns” to display in a way familiar to the Kings from their visits to Japanese gardens. King had the lanterns “set into the low brick walls around the house” at different heights for illumination and for the aesthetic effect they provided, elements strongly reminiscent of “lanterns” on display in the gardens of Japan.<sup>60</sup>

### Good Environment and Good Health

The construction of Melrose—and the Karitane Hospital located below the house that produced King’s baby food—physically and spatially expressed Truby King’s belief in the powers of environment to effect good health. Truby King fervently believed that environment, both natural and constructed, and good rearing could induce vigour and well-being in humans, plants, and animals. Discussing the health of the “young organism” in *The Feeding of Plants and Animals*, he argued that “In plants, just as in the case of animals, the inroads of disease are best prevented by keeping the organism well nourished, vigorous, and healthy.”<sup>61</sup> King brought to such problems a rigorously scientific and inquiring mind, driven by the puritanical zeal of a proselytizer confident of the significance of himself and his message and methods. Described at the time as “necessarily a keen and close observer” whose “scientific training has taught him to see straight,” King “had also the medical specialist’s love of system and horror of dirt.”<sup>62</sup> First, his training in Edinburgh, initially for a M.B.C.M. (graduating first class in 1886), then his taking of Edinburgh’s new degree in Public Health (in 1888), equipped him with the ability to observe closely and see straight.<sup>63</sup> Second, although King’s education—subsequently confirmed through his own experience in New Zealand—came at a time of growing medical specialization, this did not discourage him from writing about what are now considered non-medical areas.<sup>64</sup> Third, King’s environmental interests resonated in the new discipline of public health. Public health encouraged medics to consider a whole host of factors, especially environmental ones, when seeking to

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59 David Robson, *Bawa: The Sri Lanka Gardens* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2008), 96.

60 King, *Truby King the Man*, 305.

61 F. Truby King, *The Feeding of Plants and Animals* (Wellington: Whitcombe and Tombs, 1905).

62 *Otago Witness*, 17 January 1906, 19.

63 Philippa Mein Smith, “King, Sir (Frederic) Truby (1858–1938),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/34320> (accessed 19 December 2008).

64 Michael Peter Belgrave, “‘Medical Men’ and ‘Lady Doctors’: The Making of a New Zealand Profession, 1867–1941” (PhD thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 1985).

explain or solve illness. Fourth, environmental interests built upon King's fascination with scientific agriculture. As Mary King perceptively observed, "King was first and foremost ... a scientific farmer," and many of his later writings on health may be read from this perspective.<sup>65</sup> Over time, King applied the ideas of scientific agriculture—measured inputs of food (fertilizers, water) and careful husbanding supported by rigorous observation and organized methods—to the rearing and regulation of humans, whether infants, the insane, or sickly children.

King brought his considerable energy and personality to bear on the pressing issues of the day, which included soaring infant mortality, increasing cases of unhealthy children, and fears of national degeneration, amidst concern about a host of other social ills. To many white New Zealanders, as well as some Māori health modernizers, of the early twentieth century, it appeared that many old world serpents of urbanized European industrial society—disease, pollution, filth, and overcrowding—had arrived in New Zealand and were affecting European and Māori health and reproduction. Canterbury College Professor John Macmillan Brown (1846–1935) had his finger on the pulse of the racing anxieties of the time. One of "the intellectual dynamos and steam-rollers of his time," as poet and writer Charles Brasch (1909–73) recalled of him,<sup>66</sup> Brown drew attention to "the appearance of slums and vice" in New Zealand, lashed the nation for the "decadence" of its white race, and warned that New Zealand's (white) "fountains of population and talent" were "drying up."<sup>67</sup> Evidence of white race problems was accumulating from every conceivable quarter of the globe. Urban living, most experts concurred, was rendering the New Zealand male effeminate and infertile.<sup>68</sup> As the new century lengthened, a fuller picture of the challenges facing Europeans in New Zealand emerged. The relative unhealthiness of New Zealand's First World War conscripts (1916–18), only 34 per cent of whom passed the medical tests, provoked furrowed brows among the nation's fathers.<sup>69</sup> Its mothers, too, were suffering. Infant mortality rates were rising, and babies were dying.<sup>70</sup> Something needed to be done, especially since family problems assumed, not just private, but national and imperial significance. As King declared in 1925, "if we lack noble mothers we lack the first element of racial success and national greatness."<sup>71</sup>

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65 King, *Truby King the Man*, 85.

66 Charles Brasch, *Indirections: A Memoir, 1909–1947* (Wellington: Oxford University Press, 1980), 119.

67 J. Macmillan Brown, "The East and the West," *Press*, 24 May 1913, 8.

68 Philippa Mein Smith, "Infant Welfare Services and Infant Mortality: A Historian's View," *Australian Economic Review* 24 (1) (January 1991): 22–34.

69 Bryder, *Voice for Mothers*, 1; Margaret Tennant, *Children's Health, the Nation's Wealth: A History of Children's Health Camps* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books and Historical Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, 1994), 23.

70 Mein Smith, "Infant Welfare Services and Infant Mortality," 22–34.

71 F. Truby King, *Feeding and Care of Baby* (London: Macmillan, 1925), 153.

### Japanese Health and New Zealand

Many of the same issues pressing down upon New Zealand's population were also challenging Japan's planners, seeking to establish "the Land of the Rising Sun" as the region's dominant power. Leaders of the Meiji Government, as noted, sought modernization through selective application of western science, technology, and organizational principles.<sup>72</sup> For Japanese reformers, especially its public health officials, promised to provide the basis for a strong, successful, and healthy nation-state, laying the foundation for a fit and capable military ready to establish and uphold Japan's regional dominance. Adapting public health methods derived principally from Prussia as well as other European countries, by the 1880s "powerful instruments" of government investigated, controlled, and managed Japanese health.<sup>73</sup> A number of important organizations emerged in the crucible of reform. The Central Sanitary Bureau (CSB) (Eiseikyoku), established in 1873, initially formed part of the Ministry of Education but became in 1874 the Bureau of Hygiene (Naimushō Eiseikyoku) with its move into the Home Department. A measure of the Bureau of Hygiene's importance is that it took up over a third of the Home Department's budget. Another key component of the Bureau was the Office of Statistics (Tōkeika), which, in helping to measure the scope of the problem and the effectiveness of responses, compiled data on the nation's health. Ironically, but probably unbeknownst to Truby King, in that period Japan faced problems similar to those of other western nations. Anxieties about military healthiness were initially occasioned by the 1894/5 Sino-Japanese War, which revealed the apparent physical weakness and the smaller size of Japanese compared to western troops. In response, a Division of School Hygiene (1898) targeted children's health.<sup>74</sup>

For King, Japan offered a case study of state science that accorded with his own desires for promoting a similar programme in New Zealand. While in Japan, King observed aspects of the modernizing public health system and was, understandably as Bella put it, "anxious to see some hospitals and asylums, and also the Health Department officials in Tokio."<sup>75</sup> At Ōsaka, for instance, King visited the Military Hospital; Bella noting her husband's delight in "the lightness of the structure and the perfect sweetness and cleanliness of everything."<sup>76</sup> Sadly, I can find none of King's jottings from that visit. Evidence elsewhere, however, demonstrates King's eagerness to record aspects of Japan's scientific modernization. King scribbled notes on the diet of ordinary Japanese. He penned lists of produce grown in Japan. He photographed agricultural cultivation and methods, and even brought back to New Zealand a Japanese agricultural implement.<sup>77</sup>

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72 On which, see Low, *Science and the Building of a New Japan*.

73 Frühstück, *Colonizing Sex*, 6.

74 See *Ibid.*, 1–82.

75 B.C. King to C., 8 October 1904, in King, *Truby King the Man*, 133.

76 B.C. King to C., 25 September 1904, in *Ibid.*, 128.

77 See, for instance, 1 November 1904, Bella King, notebook, Ag-007-005/033, HL; King, *Truby King the Man*, 138; 13 October 1904, "Notes, Photographs and Mementoes."

On 5 November, Bella and Frederic visited an unnamed Agricultural College, most probably Kyoto Prefectural Agricultural and Forestry School as it was then known (presently, Kyoto Prefectural University).<sup>78</sup> Founded in 1895 and known originally as the Agricultural School of Kyoto Prefecture, by the time the Kings visited, the School had been relocated to Katsura, Kadono County.<sup>79</sup>

Penning “case-notes” that strongly reflect both his training as a physician and his fascination with lists, King described the college, its students, and agricultural practices, as well as recording observations and taking measurements of the method of cultivation and agricultural implements in use. Drawings and a detailed description of the college, its buildings, teaching rooms, and students (“intelligent looking & attentive”) resulted from this visit. Some 160 students attended the College, he noted, with most students coming from the district of Kyoto and returning to work on their modest family farms.<sup>80</sup> The last observation matches evidence elsewhere of the role of such institutions in Japanese society. With one or two exceptions, such as Sapporo Agricultural College in the early Meiji period, most agricultural colleges in Japan had low prestige compared to the social status accorded to higher learning.<sup>81</sup>

To King, these visits reinforced his existing belief in the close connection between agriculture and health. King owned farms in the Catlins area of South Otago. As Superintendent (1889–1920) of Seacliff, the large mental asylum near Dunedin, King oversaw the running of its farm, including extolling the virtues of open-air exercise in treatment of the mentally ill. Soon after his arrival, convinced that a good environment helped to produce good health and good citizens, King engaged a landscape gardener to redesign and beautify Seacliff’s grounds. King also expected patients to work in the hospital’s grounds or on its farm. The latter was an important source of fresh produce, enabling the institution to be effectively self-sufficient.<sup>82</sup> Under King’s systematic programme then, agricultural production provided the food, and agricultural labour, the activity necessary to enhance health.

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78 Its location accords with the description of the Kings’ rickshaw ride from Kyoto.

79 Kyoto Prefectural University, <http://cocktail.kpu.ac.jp/English/history.html> (accessed 9 January 2009).

80 5 November 1904, Kyoto, Bella King, notebook.

81 See Hiroko Willcock, “Traditional Learning, Western Thought, and the Sapporo Agricultural College: A Case Study of Acculturation in Early Meiji Japan,” *Modern Asian Studies* 34 (4) (October 2000): 977–1017.

82 Cheryl Caldwell, “Truby King and Seacliff, 1889–1907,” in *Unfortunate Folk: Essays on Mental Health Treatment, 1863–1992*, by postgraduate history students, University of Otago, 1972–2000, ed. Barbara Brookes and Jane Thomson (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 2001), 42–43; John Connolly, *The Construction and Government of Lunatic Asylums and Hospitals for the Insane* [1847], reprinted with an introduction by Richard Hunter (London: John Churchill, 1968); Duncan MacGregor, “Report on Lunatic Asylums of the Colony for 1897,” *Appendices to the Journal of the House of Representatives* [AJHR], vol. 3, H-7, 1898: 7.

King's experiences in Japan convinced him, as he put it, that "a return to nature can alone save the [white] race from decay."<sup>83</sup> In one of several lectures delivered upon his return from Japan, King expressed admiration for Japan's agricultural and health policies. Speaking on "Rural Education in Japan" at Wellington's 1905 Agricultural and Pastoral Conference, King acknowledged that much of the Japanese countryside was relatively backwards, but nonetheless praised the advanced state of scientific agriculture in Japan and its establishment of experimental farms, urging that New Zealand follow Japan in applying scientific agriculture to national development. Predicting that Japan would apply its scientific expertise to Manchuria on "a grand scale," "a very interesting discussion" followed, noted a newspaper report, one on the application of the Japanese method to New Zealand. In the same paper the following day and in response to the debate, Mr E. Hall moved that the government "be urged to take immediate steps to provide a more efficient system of agricultural education in rural districts" and to appoint instructors to that effect.<sup>84</sup> King praised the efficiency of Japan's mostly vegetarian lifestyle. "The Japanese," he observed, "obtained greater advantages by cultivating and consuming the products of the soil at first hand themselves, as they thus saved the waste involved in producing animal food in most European countries."<sup>85</sup>

In short, King believed that New Zealand could learn much from Japan's health policies. In his talk at the Agricultural Conference, King insisted that the most "important lesson the Japanese had to teach western nations was not so much how to rear crops as to rear human beings."<sup>86</sup> How, he asked rhetorically, could the Japanese, despite growing urbanization, not display the "tendencies to physical degeneration, such as we find causing such anxiety to the rest of the civilised world?"<sup>87</sup> Despite urbanization, the Japanese, he noted, still possessed "their principal virtues, living for the most part a healthy, active open air life in direct contact with nature. Their women," he claimed, "were not only able to bear healthy children, but to nurture them properly after birth."<sup>88</sup> For King, Japan's model country living and natural rearing and feeding were part of the answer to his own nation's problems.

King reserved particularly high praise for "the natural way" the Japanese fed their babies. He contrasted their method with European practice, in which "the milk of animals, with its baneful and often fatal, and always degenerating effects, was substituted for the food which Nature ordained for the suckling."<sup>89</sup> King made several

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83 *Evening Post*, 7 August 1905, 4. Additional details of King's talk were later published by the *Evening Post*.

84 *Evening Post*, 20 July 1905, 4.

85 *Otago Witness*, 28 June 1905, 33.

86 *West Coast Times*, 28 July 1905, 2.

87 *Evening Post*, 7 August 1905, 4.

88 *West Coast Times*, 28 July 1905, 2.

89 *Otago Witness*, 28 June 1905, 18.



subsequent references to Japanese breastfeeding to argue for its importance in New Zealand. (Natural feeding became a crucial part of the Plunket Society programme.) At the meeting which founded The Society for Promoting the Health of Women and Children, the forerunner of the Plunket Society, before a packed Dunedin Town Hall, King stressed the benefits of natural feeding for New Zealand mothers based on Japanese experience and extolled the success of a nation whose “people certainly did not lack vigour or energy or courage.”<sup>90</sup> The praise King reserved for Japanese methods of infant welfare is deeply ironic and seems to reveal his ignorance of events at the time of his visit. Figures presented by Japan’s Office of Statistics (Tōkeika) triggered contemporary Japanese anxieties about increasing infant mortality from the 1890s until the 1920s.<sup>91</sup> While later scholars initially believed that infant mortality rates had declined before the Second World War, recent research suggests that in the period the Kings visited Japan infant mortality rose, or, at the very least, did not fall significantly.<sup>92</sup> Truby King thus seems to have misunderstood or misinterpreted infant mortality in Japan. Instead, he used the example of Japan to stress the importance of infant care in New Zealand.

If Truby King’s admiration for Japanese infant welfare was misplaced, his and colleagues’ discussion of Japanese children’s welfare in schools provided a more accurate assessment of that country’s policies. Japan’s Division of School Hygiene and its comprehensive hygiene programme for schools received widespread international praise as early as 1904. Rising from an initial 30 per cent in 1902, this health programme covered 80 per cent of schools in Japan by 1918. Even by 1902—just a few years before the Kings’ visit—the results were impressive. As part of Japan’s obsession with breeding a healthy race, over 9,000 school physicians monitored the health of children in primary and secondary schools, not only educating them in the importance of healthy living, but also measuring their weight and height twice a year.<sup>93</sup> Addressing the New Zealand Branch of the British Medical Association on 5 March 1907, both King and Dr James Mason (1864–1924), Chief Health Officer of New Zealand, stressed the importance of medical inspections in schools. Mason praised Japan for its “almost superhuman” prescience in having “more medical inspectors of schools than the whole of the Old World put together.” While acknowledging the danger “of taking a lesson from such people” as

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90 *Otago Witness*, 22 May 1907, 12.

91 Frühstück, *Colonizing Sex*, 24.

92 See Osamu Saito, “Infant Mortality in Pre-Transition Japan: Levels and Trends,” in *Infant and Child Mortality in the Past*, ed. Alain Bideau, Bertrand Desjardins, and Héctor Pérez Birnoli (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 135–53. For some later estimates, note Table 8.2 “Life Expectancy at Birth and Infant Mortality for Meiji, 1870–1913: Selected Estimates,” in Saito, “Infant Mortality in Pre-Transition Japan,” 137.

93 See Frühstück, *Colonizing Sex*, 51; and Kathleen S. Uno, *Passages to Modernity: Motherhood, Childhood, and Social Reform in Early Twentieth Century Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1999).

a practice fraught with danger to the advocate in these times of “yellow peril” ...I have no hesitation in saying that the remarkable position which Japan has now taken in the councils of the nations is due to the fact that it has seized upon and carried into execution many of the schemes which scientists and politicians of the older world have been and are, alas, still debating.<sup>94</sup>

Truby King lectured on the health dangers of inadequate medical inspection in schools, without which the spread of infectious diseases like tuberculosis would result.<sup>95</sup> These views matched his arguments for the need to provide exercise areas, as well as access to fresh air, warmth, and light in New Zealand schools, and especially that “regular weighing” of every New Zealand schoolchild should take place on a monthly basis.<sup>96</sup> As a whole, King fitted Japanese models into his wider environmentalism, using them to buttress his fervent belief in the power of the natural world to cure individual and societal ills. This is particularly evident in his attitude towards the impact of urban living on health.

In concert with eugenic views of the times—which it must be remembered represented a spectrum of beliefs<sup>97</sup>—King harked back to older views equating the countryside with better health and better morality. Expressing his views with typical verve, Truby King observed that “it certainly pays to be country-bred. The cities,” he continued, “draw to themselves the crème of these youngsters, which is only natural; but the cities do not breed them, except as exotics. If the unborn would heed my advice,” he declared conclusively, “by all means be born in the country.”<sup>98</sup> Aside from being an early advocate for playgrounds for children—ideas consonant with his belief in the powers of environment on health—King, at least initially, hoped that improvements in rural education and in agricultural practices in New Zealand would check urbanization and even reverse rural-to-urban migration. Urbanization, as King declared, “constitutes a serious menace to the future welfare of the nation.”<sup>99</sup>

King’s views fitted into a tradition dating from the early days of colonization that viewed farming and rural life as morally better, and healthier, than urban and industrial living.<sup>100</sup> By the late-nineteenth century, as noted, members of an increasingly urbanized society were expressing anxieties about racial degeneracy, a plummeting birth rate,

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94 *Otago Witness*, 20 March 1907, 66.

95 *Ibid.*

96 *Taranaki Herald*, 11 March 1907, 4.

97 Peter Bowler, *The Norton History of the Environmental Sciences* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1993). On such views in New Zealand environmental ideas, see Beattie, “Colonial Geographies of Settlement.”

98 *Evening Post*, 31 July 1905, 2.

99 *Evening Post*, 7 August 1905, 4.

100 Miles Fairburn, *The Ideal Society and Its Enemies: The Foundation of Modern New Zealand Society 1850–1900* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1990).

male effeminacy, and increasing infant mortality. As a solution, thinkers harked back to pre-industrial ideals, holding fast to the power of nature to cure society's ills but modifying the means to suit the forward-thinking times. Harnessing the powers of science, many thinkers believed they could forge a modernizing, progressive society without modernity's ills. It was hoped that modern medicine and scientific agriculture, under the watchful eye of the state, could overcome the problems of illness and degraded morals associated with urban living.<sup>101</sup>

Japan thus became in King's mind an orientalized vision of what New Zealand society should be, much in the same way ironically that New Zealand itself was to serve a similar role for the Japanese thinker Shiga Shigetaka (1863–1927).<sup>102</sup> King believed that Japan offered a model of how a similarly sized country could retain its pre-industrial values and good health in an industrial age. Fitting Japan into his progressive vision of a healthy nation, at various times he applauded Japan's perceived "simplicity of life," one that "has made" it "a nursery of strong, able-bodied men and women."<sup>103</sup> He praised rural Japan's "Arcadian simplicity..., the natural and wholesome lives of its women, and their refusal to sacrifice the interests of the coming generation to their own love of pleasure."<sup>104</sup> Later in life, when explaining the ideal behind the Karitane Hospital constructed on his property at Melrose, King observed that he and his wife had "found the Japanese far less insistent than our own race on the personal acquisition and possession of things which attracted them, so long as they had occasionally the fresh privilege of visiting beautiful places and seeing beautiful and inspiring things."<sup>105</sup> However orientalized, however essentialized these visions of Japanese society may be, they are nonetheless symptomatic of the deep hold Japan had on both Truby and Bella King and its impact on their ideas about gardening, health, and agriculture in New Zealand.

## Conclusion

King's health views and the Kings' enthusiastic gardening and planting individually track the preoccupations of the times, but also the particular circumstances of their own experiences. Their experience supports the work of Duncan Campbell and others, who argue that "Asia" has figured far more prominently in people's lives in New Zealand than previously acknowledged. Designs, objects, and ideas from Asia contributed in significant ways to the intellectual, cultural, and social fabric, not only of the British

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101 Erik Olssen, *Building the New World: Work, Politics and Society in Caversham, 1880s–1920s* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1995); Erik Olssen, "Towards a New Society," in *Oxford History of New Zealand*, ed. Geoffrey Rice, vol. 2 (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1992), 254–84.

102 Ken McNeil, "New Zealand through a Japanese Glass, 1869–1944," *Japan Forum* 18 (1) (2006): 23–43; Gavin, *Shiga Shigetaka*.

103 *Otago Witness*, 26 July 1905, 8.

104 *Evening Post*, 20 July 1905, 4.

105 Quoted in King, *Truby King the Man*, 309.

Empire, but also of western society in this period.<sup>106</sup> More than just the object of racist anxieties, more than simply the feared source of the “yellow peril,” Japan shaped the aesthetics, health ideas, and gardening practices of two influential Europeans in early-twentieth-century New Zealand. Further studies of other aspects of Asia–New Zealand connections—whether through biographies of individuals, such as Macmillan Brown or Thomas Hocken, or through discussion of collecting and design habits—are sure to reveal more of those “strange rich surfaces” amidst the seemingly grey bicultural New Zealand of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.

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