

## Hearn's Kumamoto Days: An Attempt at Re-evaluation

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The general impression we have of Lafcadio Hearn's Kumamoto days (November 1891 to October 1894) is one of three years of general discomfort.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Hearn, at his period of greatest disenchantment, says as much: "I have been so unhappy in Kumamoto for three years that my nerves are worn out. . . . A foreigner among Japanese officials is simply a *go-ishi*, a pawn. He has no friend, and no sympathy."<sup>2</sup> This stands in contrast to his stay in Matsue where he seems to have had the single most perfect year in his life.<sup>3</sup> Though both of these views are true in many ways, in other ways they are plainly myopic. By re-examining Hearn's daily life in Kumamoto as expressed in his letters and works, perhaps we can make a truer, more objective evaluation of his stay there and determine what, if anything, Hearn got from his Kumamoto days.

Although Kumamoto was welcomingly warmer than Matsue, Hearn was immediately disappointed with the city's visual appearance, a disappointment that gradually intensified into dislike and occasional hatred. Soon after arriving, he wrote to his former Matsue student, Otani Masanobu, that "Kumamoto is not nearly so pretty a city as Matsue, although it is as neat as Tenjin-machi. There are some very beautiful houses and hotels, but the common houses are not so fine as those of Matsue. Most of the old Shizoku houses were burned during the Satsuma war, so that . . . it is very hard to find a nice house [to live in]. There is, of course, no lake here, and no beautiful scenery like that of Shinji-ko; but on clear days we can see the smoke rising from the great volcano of Aso-san."<sup>4</sup> But the sight of smoke from a distant and virtually inaccessible volcano did not long hold the interest of this man who loved the sea. In nearly every letter of the first few months, Hearn compared some aspect of Kumamoto with Matsue and found the former wanting. As he confided to Professor Chamberlain of Tokyo University, "Matsue is incomparably prettier and better built and in every way more interesting than Kumamoto" (XIV, 181).

Several months later, the idiom with which he expressed his dissatisfaction toughened: "The city is devilishly ugly and commonplace--an enormous, half-Europeanized garrison-town, full of soldiers" (XIV, 186). Even in his public writing, he describes Kumamoto in words that do not mince:

A vast, straggling, dull, unsightly town is Kumamoto: there are no quaint, pretty streets, no great temples, no wonderful gardens. Burnt to the ground in the civil war

of the tenth of Meiji, the place gives you the impression of a wilderness of flimsy shelters erected in haste almost before the soil had ceased to smoke. There are no remarkable places to visit (not, at least, within city limits), no sights, no amusements.<sup>5</sup>

But most of all Hearn missed Matsue's Japanese-ness. "There are no shops here full of household shrines of hinoki-wood for sale, no display of shimenawa over doors," he lamented to Chamberlain (XIV, 181). And in another early letter (to Nishida), he further complained that "there is nothing pretty in the shape of laquer-ware, porcelain, or bronze. There is no art, and there are no kakemonos, and no curio-shops" (XIV, 169). Of course, there were curio-shops, kakemonos, ceramics, and art, but apparently Hearn did not find them.<sup>6</sup> Even after a year and a half, he continued to express strong dislike for the city. This was a feeling that neither Nishida nor Setsu could understand. They believed that the fault lay not with the city or its people but with Hearn's inability to perceive the hidden good. With the two people closest to him in the world unable to sympathize with him, he felt compelled to explain:

You wonder why I hate Kumamoto. Well, firstly, because it is *modernized*. And then I hate it because it is too big, and has no temples and priests and curious customs in it. Thirdly, I hate it because it is ugly. Fourthly I hate it because I am still a stranger in it,--and perhaps because I can't get literary material. But Settsu . . . says it is better to stay here another year or two,--that it might be much worse elsewhere. Perhaps she is right. She thinks, like you do, that the only trouble is I can't understand these people. (Ichikawa, 81)

Near the end of his three years in Kumamoto, his opinion was not much changed. He had visited a few famous temples and shrines and Suizenji Park, but somehow they failed to arouse much enthusiasm. With few exceptions, he still found Kumamoto a place with little of interest to see or do.

Matsue was prettier and more interesting to Hearn, but it too had some naggingly serious flaws. One of those was the cold climate, the depth of Hearn's concern with which is often underestimated. In Matsue, though he was reluctant to admit it, Hearn was becoming deeply worried about his health and vitality: "There is almost perpetual rain and gloom, and I would almost dislike Izumo were it not that one lovely day in a month is enough to make me forgive and forget all the bad weather. . . . I have a passport for all of Izumo; but the weather is diabolical; and though my chest is very strong, I feel that it is a severe strain to keep well even at home" (XIV, 124-25). In the next letter his concern had become graver and more immediate:

I have been severely touched where I thought myself strongest--in my lungs--and have passed some weeks in bed. My first serious discouragement came with this

check to my enthusiasm. I fear a few more winters of this kind will put me underground. (XIV, 125-26)

A close look at his diction suggests that Hearn was extremely disturbed while not wanting to appear overly so. The lightness of "touched" attempts to mollify the force of "severely," while the mildness of "discouragement" sounds almost ironic as qualified by "serious." This little "check to [his] enthusiasm" actually blew a large hole in Hearn's picture of Matsue as a place he could continue to live and work in. For Hearn, the move to the tropically warm climate that Kumamoto promised was prompted in part by nothing less than self-preservation.<sup>7</sup> It was one thing to put up with cold, wet, gloomy days in his beloved Matsue, but it was quite another to be sick for weeks at a time and possibly even die there.

But it was not cold and gloom alone that marred Hearn's time in Matsue. He was, in his last days there, already beginning to feel the lack of literary inspiration of which he complained so bitterly in Kumamoto. The first elations and sensations of Japanese life that had thrilled and stimulated him before were already dying while in Matsue: "Never a fine inspiration, a deep emotion, a profound joy or a profound pain--never a thrill... . So literary work is dry, bony, hard, dead work," he wrote to Chamberlain (XIV, 137). And later, to Ellwood Hendrick, he confessed: "I find literary work extremely difficult here. . . . No strong emotion, no thrills or inspirations ever come to me" (XIV, 163-64).

Perhaps more importantly, however, Hearn was also beginning to harbor misgivings about the nature of the Japanese people themselves: "the harder side of the Japanese character is beginning to appear--in spots. . . . About the men--one never gets very close to them. One's best friends [Nishida?] have a certain far-offness about them, even when breaking their necks to please you" (XIV, 164-65). In Kumamoto, these complaints of a lack of literary inspiration would continue, becoming more strident and desperate, and the distance between Hearn and his Japanese associates would, for the most part, increase. But the appearance in Hearn's writings of negative feelings about Japan and the Japanese, we must remember, do not begin (or end) in Kumamoto. The seeds of disillusion had already been planted in Matsue and would never disappear from Hearn's mental landscape of the country.

The full force of Kumamoto's westernization hit Hearn hard upon his arrival: he was shown the special house set aside for the foreign lecturer where he was expected to live--a large and thoroughly European style house with no Japanese rooms or furnishings whatsoever. To his Japanese hosts, anxious to please the new teacher, the house was a magnificent structure, luxuriously appointed with carpets and chairs, "full of

fireplaces and corridors" (to Nishida, 11/20/91), perfect to make even the most demanding foreigner comfortable. To Hearn it was an abomination, the very antithesis of the house he had so loved in Matsue, of what he loved about Japan and had hoped to find more of in Kumamoto. And though the school offered the house to him rent-free, he declined, preferring to live at a hotel until he found a house comparable to the one he had in Matsue. What his hosts' reaction to this refusal was, we may never know, but no doubt they were at least puzzled by this strange, new staff member. This incident was almost symbolic of Hearn's problem with Kumamoto. The modernized western comforts that his hosts were proud to offer, he felt affronted, if not repulsed, by.

Though Hearn complained that it was hard to find a nice house in post-Seinan-War Kumamoto, with the help of the wife of General Fujisaki, a relative of one of his former Matsue students, he did:

I have been fortunate enough to find one nearly as nice as the one I had in Matsue, but the garden is not nearly so pretty; and the rent is eleven dollars--nearly 3 times more than what I paid in Matsue. (XIV, 173)<sup>8</sup>

As usual, the severity of Hearn's criticism increased when, two months later, he wrote that this house was "not nearly so beautiful as that in Matsue" (XIV, 186).

Just as in Matsue, the style of Hearn's domestic life in Kumamoto was almost purely Japanese--at least at the beginning. It is described in a letter to his American friend, Page Baker, editor of the New Orleans newspaper that Hearn had reported for:

About my every-day life. Well, it is the simplest and most silent of lives--in a simple Japanese house. I use one chair, only for writing at a high table on account of my eyes. Most of my life I spend squatting on the floor. Europeans can seldom get used to this; but it has become second nature to me. . . . We rest, eat, talk, read, and sleep on the floor. (XIV, 199)

Hearn's pride in being able to live on tatami like the Japanese is charmingly apparent, and he takes great pleasure in describing the Japanese floor as a "great soft mattress . . . spotlessly clean. No dust is ever suffered upon it--not a speck. Therefore we live barefooted in summer, or wearing only stockings in winter" (XIV, 199).<sup>9</sup> As in the Kitabori-machi house in Matsue, his bed was still a futon, and in the middle of the room was the "smoking box" (hibachi) surrounded by "kneeling-cushions" (zabuton). He also extolled the virtues of the Japanese style bath, but found it rather too hot, as many Westerners do: "It is *almost* scalding always--hard to get used to; but the best in the world because you can't take cold after it" (XIV, 200). Hearn never did get used to it, and always bathed in a somewhat luke-warm version.

In December 1892, probably to get away from a newly arrived Catholic missionary whose churchbells were ringing out just a few doors from the Hearn household,<sup>10</sup> Hearn moved to a better house in Tsuboi-machi, which he immediately described in a letter to Chamberlain:

The house is pretty, and it has a landscape garden--not so quaintly beautiful as that in Matsue, but quite nice with artificial hills, pines trimmed strata-fashion, and an amazing multitude of stones. There are glass bells tinkling at the eaves; and there are monkeys painted in the watercloset. (XV, 347)

Perhaps no house could have seemed to him quite as wonderful as that in Matsue, but he liked it very much. He also delighted in the fact that the house was "surrounded by cemeteries and images of Gods" (XV, 345). According to biographer Elizabeth Stevenson, Hearn liked to stroll in this garden which was decorated with fifteen boulders transported from the bed of the Shirakawa River.<sup>11</sup> In his essay "On the Eternal Feminine," Hearn marveled that the landlord had paid over 750 Japanese dollars (yen) for these fifteen rocks, "considerably more than the pretty house itself could possibly have cost" (VII, 94). These were rocks (he wrote to Hendrick) that no American would give 5 cents for (XIV, 231). From this Kumamoto house, through the rocks in that garden and the design on those fusuma, Hearn's appreciation and understanding of Japanese aesthetics deepened, and he was able to express that uniquely sensitive appreciation in what Chamberlain praised as one of the best essays on Japan that Hearn had ever written.

Though the garden remained perfectly Japanese, Hearn made one big change in the house's Japanese-style interior: in an isolated eight-mat room that would become his private study, he had carpenters install a wood-burning stove and shoji with glass panes to hold in the heat. The cost was an extravagant 25 yen, but Hearn was happy, boasting to Nishida that:

On the coldest days I have a summer heat in the room, and at night, while the air is warm, I never cough. . . . I ought to have done this long ago; but it was hard to find a Japanese house adapted to the introduction of a stove, and with a room isolated like mine. (Ichikawa, 65)

For Hearn, this was a great concession to modernization that his principles abhorred but his body craved. His stubborn and nearly uncompromising embrace of all things Japanese in Matsue was fragmenting. He seems almost apologetic in telling the news to Chamberlain, as if this concession to Western life-style somehow detracted from his credentials as a Japanophile:

I did without fire for two winters; for a hibachi is not fire, you know; it is only a ghost, or a pipe-light--and a Kotatsu requires a prolonged discipline of the spinal

muscles, which I lack. And this winter, in spite of my love and enthusiasm for things Japanese, I find myself obliged to hire many carpenters to fix my study--putting in glass shoji, and *erecting a stove*. Because the cold "is simply impossible to bear." (XV, 345)

The sitting on tatami, which he had described earlier as "second nature" to him, had now ceased to be comfortable. What he had believed was "second nature" had become, over time, incompatible with his basic needs. In Kumamoto, Hearn was being forced to face the fact that, in spite of his deep admiration for all things Japanese, he himself was not.

When the warmth of spring came, Hearn's general mood brightened, and he wrote to Chamberlain about how lovely his new house's garden was:

. . . the mental blues are gone, and instead of them comes a blaze of blue light, true summer color, into the room where the stove was. For the winter partition and the stove itself have been removed, and the room is open to the sky and to a burst of blossom-splendor from the garden. I had no idea what wealth of flowers I had, there are fully forty kinds. (XV, 409)

In this new house, with work to do and a physically and emotionally supportive environment, Hearn comfortably passed the rest of his time in Kumamoto.

In the house, Hearn nearly always wore Japanese clothes and, while in Kumamoto, he became quite knowledgeable about them.<sup>12</sup> He had no Western-style formal clothes of the type that were required at formal banquets, etc., but he did have formal Japanese (*mon-tsuki*) dress. At a banquet to which teachers and government officials were invited early in 1892, Hearn must have turned a few heads when he appeared in his quintessentially Japanese formal kimono while most of the Japanese guests wore the latest styles of black frock coats and silk hats.

His Kumamoto days afforded him a special appreciation for Japanese clothes in hot weather. When he traveled to the open port of Nagasaki briefly in the summer of 1893, he ascribed a great deal of the misery of that trip to his European-style dress: "Had I donned Japanese clothes instead of a duck suit, I would have been comfortable. . . . If I had to wear European clothes and live in a European house in such heat for one week, I should go crazy or die" (XV, 4). Back in Kumamoto, he was happy again: "I am again in a yukata--upon tatami--in real Japan" (same letter). Though he had once written that "Kumamoto doesn't seem to me Japan at all," compared with the open port of Nagasaki, it seemed very authentically Japanese indeed.

In the very next letter, again to Chamberlain, he strongly denounces Western wear and highly endorses Japanese wear for summer. Here is the

relative neophyte giving the old master a lesson learned in Kumamoto about things Japanese:

It rejoiced me to hear of your living in the Japanese wing, and in yukata. I am sure it is the best thing you could do for your health in this hot season. Foreign dress soaks through almost immediately, and then becomes a wet wrap which, breathed on by a cold wind, chills the lungs at once. I have been wearing considerably less than a yukata lately during the hottest part of the day; but when I go out in a white suit I wonder how any Japanese can don yofuku in July and August. Now matter how thin, a tight-fitting dress is a torture in this heat to anybody accustomed to the kimono. (XVI, 12)

On a more theoretical level, Hearn agreed wholeheartedly with Chamberlain that even the Japanese wore yofuku only as a kind of “uniform” that affords them “protection by mimicry” (XVI, 104), that is, protection against Western influence by camouflage. Once safely inside their houses, Japanese put on their *real* clothes. As he explained in his essay “Jiu-jitsu,” written in Kumamoto, Japanese clothing is perhaps “the most dignified, the most comfortable, and the most healthy in the world” (VII, 154), whereas Western dress is “totally unsuited to a Japanese interior; and would render the national squatting, or kneeling, posture extremely painful or difficult for the wearer” (VII, 155). He dressed in formal Western dress as seldom as possible, and then only, he claimed, to please his wife.<sup>13</sup>

From the above quotations, one might get the impression that Hearn naturally disliked the heat of Kumamoto in summer, but the opposite is true: Hearn relished the hot, baking summer heat as an old man relishes a scalding hot bath. To Hearn, heat symbolized the life force itself. In hot weather, he claimed, he felt more alive, his physical juices readily flowed, and even his vision improved temporarily after a hot bath. In July 1893, bogged down with a heavy load of year-end examinations to correct, he wrote to Chamberlain that “the heat alone is pleasing--it has become almost West Indian. . . . I don’t think you could bear the heat in Kumamoto now; I like it, except at night, when there are no windows to open, and the mosquitoes are very atrocious” (XV, 457,462).

The insects of Kumamoto were both interesting and annoying to Hearn. Like the “atrocious” mosquitoes mentioned above, Hearn’s summer evenings were also tormented by “those horrible beetles in Kumamoto” called the *gane-bun-bun*. Then he discovered the name of an even more unpleasant one: As he wrote to Nishida in August 1893, “The *gane-bun-bun* is not the greatest plague I was complaining of--but the *fumushi*. . . . They make a whole room smell horribly” (XIV, 251-52). As far as Hearn knew, these insects were strange to Nishida, so for a joke he put a dead one in the envelope and sent it to him “in hopes of inducing the rest to emigrate” to Izumo. Hearn even found Kumamoto’s cicadas to be

“extraordinary semi--quite different from those of Izumo” because they “cry piteously and utter plaintive squeals when seized by little boys” (XVI, 9). There was no Izumo Taisha, but there were many things of natural interest and beauty in Kumamoto which caught Hearn's imagination.

While residing in Matsue, Hearn boasted in a letter to Chamberlain that he was living and eating exactly the same as the Japanese:

I have become so accustomed to Japanese food and habits that it would now be painful for me to change them. The only extras, besides sake, which I take, are plenty of fried and raw eggs. (XIV, 114)

Of course, the typical diet in Meiji Japan contained far less meat than it does today. In Matsue, Hearn was eating “rice, fish, beans, lotus, various vegetables, including bamboo shoots, and seaweed” (XIV, 197). He even surprised himself at how much he had grown to like certain strange Japanese foods, such as pickled daikon (XIV, 160), and he praised Japanese tea saying with typical overstatement that “once used to it, you cannot bear the sight of European tea any more” (XIV, 197).

But one year and eight months later, in a letter to Page Baker, he was telling a different story. To his regret he had discovered that there were physical limits to how much he could immerse himself in Japanese ways and live like a Japanese:

The fact is I lived for one year exclusively on Japanese food, which Europeans, among others Mr. Chamberlain, consider almost impossible. I must confess, however, that it broke me down. After twelve months I could not eat at all. (XIV, 197)

So with the unwelcome memories of a complete digestive breakdown and of his lungs badly affected by Matsue's winter, it was extremely fortunate for his sometimes fragile health that Hearn came to Kumamoto, for despite his many dissatisfactions, he had no complaint about the food. The rent was high, the *kurumaya* were *oni*, but “there is much good bread and meat and sake and food of all kinds” (XIV, 169, Nishida). The variety of accessible meat in Kumamoto was virtually unknown in Matsue, as one of Hearn's early Kumamoto letters reveals. One morning soon after settling into their house in Tetorihon-machi, Setsu was surprised to discover a “mezurashii kedamono in the next yard. We looked out, and the extraordinary animal was a goat. Some geese were also a subject of wonder, and a pig. None of these creatures are to be seen in Izumo” (XIV, 181-82). With all of this animal protein available to his table (and bread and foreign beer) Hearn's health returned:

I have become stronger than I have been for years. All my clothes, even my Japanese kimono, have become too small!! But I cannot say whether this be the



climate or the diet or what. Setsu says it is because I have a good wife. My lungs are sound as a bell; I never cough at all. (XIV, 178)

Hearn repeats this information several times in his correspondence, saying he has gained about twenty pounds (nine kilograms) just a few months after moving to Kumamoto (XIV, 172). Now, instead of eating only Japanese food every day as he did in Matsue, Hearn was regularly able to take a largely Western-style diet. "I now eat Japanese food only once a day," he wrote to Baker, "and morning and evening indulge in beefsteak, bread, and Bass's Ale" (XIV, 197).

The abundance of good things to eat in Kumamoto was also one of the lures by which he hoped to attract his friends to come and visit him. To Mason, he wrote: "You delighted me with a hope of seeing you here at No. 34. I think I can make you cosy. Are you accustomed to a Japanese house? I have no chairs and tables a l'Europeen; but everything else is possible. I can give you good seyoryori, whiskey, Bass, or Guinness" (XVI, 312), and he tried to tempt a visit from Chamberlain by offering "beefsteak, potatoes, roast chicken, and Bass's ale" (XVI, 309).

When Chamberlain complained of low energy and general malaise, Hearn put his Kumamoto experience into words and promptly recommended that he indulge in "claret and beef and puddings and pies and liqueurs" as well as "cigars and brandy" (XV, 453). When Chamberlain laughed at this advice,<sup>14</sup> Hearn defended heavy Western food as the source of physical force, a surplus of which was necessary to conquer any chronic health problem (XV, 457).

Although Hearn and Chamberlain playfully referred to the topic as "the solemn question of food," to Hearn food *was* a serious matter: he felt that his very ability to study and write were entirely dependent upon it. In fact, he even went so far as to attribute the low-level performance of his students at the Fifth High School to their inadequate nourishment:

The students attempt to do on rice and gruel what foreign students can only do on beef, eggs, puddings, heavy nutritious diet. . . . The higher schools don't feed their boys well--not so well by half as the Government feeds the soldiers. (XIV, 209-210)

Food fuels the brain, and Hearn felt that the average Japanese student was not "sufficiently strong and sufficiently nourished to bear the tremendous strain put upon him at the higher schools and the university" (XIV, 210). But happily for Hearn, while in Kumamoto he himself became at forty-three years old "much stronger than [he] was at thirty" (XIV, 236). This renewed physical strength enabled him to do a great deal of significant writing while in Kumamoto.

If Hearn ate well in Kumamoto, he also drank well, learning more about sake and becoming increasingly fond of it. From Matsue he wrote

to Chamberlain that: "I have become what they call here a jogo--and find that a love of sake creates a total change in all one's eating habits and tastes. All the sweet things the geko likes, I cannot bear when taking sake" (XIV, 160). Fascinated by the seemingly intricate rules of etiquette pertaining to the drinking of sake, Hearn hoped one day to learn enough to write an essay about the role of sake in Japanese society. He never wrote the essay, but he did describe his fondness for sake in a Kumamoto letter to Page Baker, likening its effects to those of narcotics:

There is no liquor in the world upon which a man becomes so quickly intoxicated, and yet none of which the effects last so short a time. The intoxication is pleasant as the effect of opium or hasheesh. It is a soft, pleasant, luminous exhilaration: everything becomes brighter, happier, lighter;--then you get very sleepy. (XIV, 197-98)

Whether or not Hearn had actually experienced opium or hasheesh we do not know,<sup>15</sup> but he was definitely fond of alcohol. He was not a particularly strong drinker, but he admired the drinking capacity of some of the Japanese people. "A quart of sake is a good load; two quarts require iron nerves to stand. But among the Japanese there are wonderful drinkers" (XIV, 197-98). He describes a scene from a military officer's banquet he attended in Kumamoto where "a captain offered me a tumbler holding a good pint of sake--I almost fainted at the sight of it; for it was only the first. But a friend said to me: 'Only drink a little, and pass it back'--which I did. Stronger heads emptied cup after cup like water" (XIV, 198). With Western food, which he ate twice a day, Hearn preferred whisky or British ale, and seemed to have confined his sake consumption to parties and public functions, which he increasingly avoided.

A look at a typical day in the Kumamoto life of Lafcadio Hearn, reconstructed from information in his works and letters, reveals a scene of striking regularity and domestic tranquility.<sup>16</sup> At 6 a.m. his wife wakes him up, and the first thing he does is to squat in front of the hibachi and have a smoke from one of his more than 100 Japanese pipes (kiseru). (The tatami in his smoking room are full of small round burn spots where hot ash had fallen.) Prayers are then said and offerings made to the family's ancestors (the kamidana are preserved in his old residences). At 7 a.m. he has breakfast, which he describes as being "very light." It is thoroughly Western-style, consisting of eggs and toast, lemonade with a spoonful of whisky in it, and black coffee. His wife serves and takes a little token food with him, but her main breakfast will be later, Japanese style, with the rest of the family after Hearn leaves. Apparently Hearn sometimes used this breakfast time to teach Setsu simple English conversation. After breakfast the kurumaya comes and Hearn puts on his

yofuku, submitting to the ancient custom in which the wife hands the husband each article of clothing in regular order.

Lunch is at home and is presumably the one Japanese-style meal of the day.<sup>17</sup> Then he does his reading and writing work--literary, school-related, or personal correspondence. When the weather is hot, he sleeps from 3 to 4 p.m. while the women make clothes and the men work in the garden. Bathtime is around 6 p.m., supper from 6:30 to 7:30, and at 8 p.m. they gather around the hibachi for games or songs or conversation. Then he signals bedtime, and goes off to read or write until he goes to sleep.

As for amusements (he wrote to Baker) there are Japanese theaters, street festivals (he saw the Boshita matsuri and found it quite interesting), visits of friends, Japanese newspapers (read with the family around the hibachi with Setsu explaining things and answering his questions), occasional pilgrimages to various places (he visited Hommyo-ji, Kato shrine, Takahashi-inari, Fujisaki shrine, Suizenji park), and shopping (he enjoyed buying Japanese things for Setsu). While in Kumamoto, he and his wife frequently took walks in the evening, as we know from Setsu's memory of a strange stroll through the cemetery behind the Fifth High School.<sup>18</sup> From his father-in-law he was learning Japanese archery (kyudo), a popular sport with his colleagues, practicing so enthusiastically that the skin of his hand was sometimes "cut to pieces" (XVI, 213). Though Kumamoto seemed a "dull, dead town," he still managed to enjoy his free time there.

It is well known that Hearn's unhappiness with some of his affected, Westernized, seemingly unfriendly colleagues and with the impersonal, sometimes mercurial government administration of the Fifth High School often made his life in Kumamoto rather lonely. But that very loneliness and social isolation provided him with time and concentration for his work. In several letters of this period he remarked that, despite not getting fresh or exotic sensations from the city, his literary work was going well. In fact, however, he did get material for some of his most memorable writings from Kumamoto (*Out of the East, Kokoro*), and the voluminous letters written during his Kumamoto years, containing some of his most emotional as well as intellectual struggles, form in themselves a rich and significant body of his writing. *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan*, his great two-volume tribute to Izumo, was written entirely in Kumamoto.

In retrospect, we can see that much of Hearn's criticism of Kumamoto arose from his basic dislike of cities and modernity everywhere. In Kumamoto this fact became painfully clear to him:

I like little towns. . . . I cannot like the new Japan. I dislike the officials, the imitation of foreign ways, the airs, the conceits . . . . I wish I could fly out of Meiji

forever. . . . The life of the old fans, the old byobu, the tiny villages—that is the *real* Japan I love. Somehow or other, Kumamoto does n't seem to me Japan at all. I hate it. (XIV, 262-63)

Actually, Hearn sooner or later grew to hate most of the bigger cities he ever lived in: Cincinnati, where he worked as a journalist; Memphis, where he stopped on his way to New Orleans; New Orleans, which he loved at first but later grew to hate (or so he said); and New York, which he dreaded but visited from time to time. For a writer who craved exotic material to satisfy his audience's thirst for the queer and unfamiliar, Kumamoto was simply too modernized and too westernized. Once he described it as a prison at the bottom of hell, but still it was not the worst he could imagine.

What can one do in a city without temples, art, or courtesy? Still Kumamoto is better for me than Tokyo could be, or Kanazawa; the people know me, and I have much leisure and rest, and the climate is warm. (XV, 464)

With ample free time, few distractions, a steady and generous income, a comfortable home, warm afternoons, hot summers, and plenty of good food, Hearn spent, despite all his protestations, a healthy and productive three years in Kumamoto. The big, ugly, soldier-packed city may not have been what he wanted, but it may well have been what he needed.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>See Kawarabata Masayuki, "Lafcadio Hearn at the Dai-Go-Koto-Chugakko," *Hobun Ronso* 17, Kumamoto University 1964, pp.48-64, (in Japanese). Professor Kawarabata rightly blames "the Imperial Diet rather than the School," for Hearn's discomfort, but he fails to consider the variety of other factors affecting Hearn's experience in Kumamoto.

<sup>2</sup>*Some New Letters and Writings of Lafcadio Hearn*, ed. Sanki Ichikawa (Tokyo: Kenkyusha, 1925), p.119-20.

<sup>3</sup>The Matsue period is so prominent in the general image of Hearn that American author and Hearn scholar, Oscar Lewis, in his introduction to *Kwaidan*, can write with perfect assurance: "The outlines of [Hearn's] life are well known. After a few months, he managed to be appointed a teacher in a native school in the province of Izumo, where he spent *several productive years*" (my italics). *Kwaidan: Stories and Studies of Strange Things*, (New York: Dover Publications, 1968), xi. Hearn was in Matsue just over a year, in Kumamoto nearly three.

<sup>4</sup>*The Writings of Lafcadio Hearn*, 16 vols. (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1922) XIV, 173. All references to Hearn's works are to this edition. Except for a brief mention in "The Stone Buddha," this is one of his only references to Aso. So far as we know, he never visited there.

<sup>5</sup>"With Kyushu Students," *Writings*, VII, 26.

<sup>6</sup>The one product he did find to be cheaper and more beautiful in Kumamoto was silk, which he often bought for his wife.

<sup>7</sup>"The facts are that all things are impermanent in the Province of the Gods; that the winters are very severe; and that I have received a call from the great Government college in Kyushu, far south, where snow rarely falls. Also I have been very sick; and the prospect of a milder climate had much influence in shaping my decision." "Sayonara!" *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan*, VI, 387.

<sup>8</sup>This is the house that is now preserved in Tetori-hon-machi, somewhat altered and in a slightly different location.

<sup>9</sup>Also described in "Jiu-jitsu," *Out of the East*, VII, 155.

<sup>10</sup>This was the French missionary, Father Cole. See Maruyama Manabu, Koizumi Yagumo Shinko (Tokyo, 1976) pp.233-35, for a detailed account.

<sup>11</sup>Elizabeth Stevenson, *Lafcadio Hearn*, Octagon Books, New York 1961, reprinted 1979, p.261.

<sup>12</sup>In a letter to Page Baker, XIV, 367-69, Hearn shows a rather detailed knowledge of the various types of Japanese wear and their market prices.

<sup>13</sup>"He cared for neither a swallow-tailed nor a Prince Albert coat. He always said of them, and of white shirts and silk hats,--'How barbarous they are!'" At her request he had a Prince Albert coat made but hardly wore it. "Whenever he had to wear it he always made a fuss. He would put it on unwillingly, saying, 'I simply wear this to please you. Whenever I go out, you always wish me to put on a new suit or a Prince Albert,--all of which I hate. This is no joke; I mean it.'" Setsu Koizumi, *Reminiscences of Lafcadio Hearn*, (New York, 1918) pp.55-56.

<sup>14</sup>*Letters From B. H. Chamberlain to Lafcadio Hearn*. Compiled by Kazuo Koizumi. (Tokyo, Hokuseido Press, 1936), p.24.

<sup>15</sup>He wrote several articles on narcotics in New Orleans and was familiar with that side of the city's life.

<sup>16</sup>The point that Hearn's home and family were very comfortable and supportive is also made by Stevenson in her chapter on Kumamoto. The basic outline of Hearn's daily life appears in a letter to Chamberlain (XVI,46-48).

<sup>17</sup>This is somewhat at odds with Hearn's letter to Hendrick (XIV,206) in which he states: "At the college there is always a recess of half an hour at noon, for dining. I do not dine, but climb the hill behind the college."

<sup>18</sup>"When at Kumamoto we two often went out for a walk in the night-time. On the first walk at Kumamoto I was led to a graveyard, for on the previous day he said: 'I have found a pleasant place. Let us go there to-morrow night.' Through a dark path I was led on, until we came up a hill, where were many tombs [Omine-bochi]. Dreary place it was! He said: 'Listen and hear the voices of frogs.'" *Writings*, XIII,120. For a slightly different English rendering of the same episode, see *Reminiscences of Lafcadio Hearn*, p. 18-19.