A HARROWING FAILURE.

THE ECLIPSE OBSERVERS IN JAPAN DEFEATED BY CLOUDS.

SHIRAKAWA, Japan, August 20.

The United States Eclipse Expedition, consisting of Professor D. P. Todd, accompanied by his wife, and the Rev. W. J. Holland, Ph. D., of Pittsburg, Penn., reached Yokohama on July 9, and was immediately recruited by the addition of Lieutenant W. H. H. Southerland, U. S. N., and Passed Assistant Engineer Pemberton, U. S. N., who were detailed by Admiral Chandler, under the instructions of the Secretary of the Navy, to accompany the expedition. The services of Mr. R. Hitchcock, of the Smithsonian Institution, temporarily residing in Japan, were also secured. Mr. Hitchcock was accompanied by Mrs. Hitchcock. Arrangements were also made by which the services of a number of other persons, resident foreigners and natives, might be secured to assist in the manipulation of the various instruments at the time of the eclipse. A preliminary tour of observation extending from Tokio northward, through Utsinomiyo, Kuroiso, Shirakawa, Shirasaka, and Nikko, was undertaken by Professor Todd, Dr. Holland, and Lieutenant Southerland, accompanied by Dr. W. N. Whitney, the accomplished and amiable interpreter of the United States Legation in Tokio, whose services the Minister Resident of the United States kindly placed at the disposal of the party. The result of this tour as well as repeated conferences with Dr. Knipping, the head of the Meteorological Bureau of the Japanese Imperial Navy Department, led to the selection of Shirakawa as the site for observations of the eclipse. Professor Todd and Lieutenant Southerland returned from Nikko to Tokio and immediately made arrangements for the transfer of the instruments of the expedition from Yokohama to the site selected, which is 113 miles north of Tokio by rail.

Shirakawa, was reached upon July 22. Authority had been received from the Military Department of the Japanese Government to occupy the ruins of the Castle at Shirakawa which formerly belonged to the Abe family, adherents of the Shogun, who in the revolution of 1868 had with other daimos, or native princes, been overthrown by the followers of the Mikado. The ruins constitute a massive pile and cover a territory nearly three quarters of a mile in diameter. The citadel of the castle, which commands a wide prospect over a broad and fertile valley, bounded upon the Western horizon by a range of mountains of which Nasu-take is the highest peak, was chosen as the immediate site of the party of observation. Shelter tents kindly loaned by the War Department of the Japanese Government were at once erected to cover the party, who after a brief stay at the principal inn in the town removed to them upon July 26. All the instruments brought from the United States, and a large number loaned by Admiral Yanagi, Hydrographer of the Japanese Navy, from the Naval Observatory attached to his Bureau, were successfully transported from Tokio to Shirakawa. Mr. Narabara, president of the Japanese Railroad Company, providing free transportation for the same and all members of the party. The Prefect of Fukushima, to which ken Shirakawa belongs, provided at once the necessary military and police protection to guard the party against unnecessary intrusion and too much thanks cannot be expressed for this kindly measure.

The erection of the necessary buildings, which had to be of unusual size and stability, owing to the nature of the instruments, was at once begun. In two weeks the essential parts of the larger apparatus were all in position, only awaiting the finishing touches of the astronomer to adjust them and bring them into perfect working order, and in due time the minute and elaborate preparations had been completed. After a night made memorable, as one or two others had been, by slight shocks of earthquake, so slight, however, as not to interfere with the position of the well-mounted instruments of the expedition, the long-expected day dawned. Above was a cloudless sky, but all along the horizon, north, south, east, and west, the sunlit tops of great cumulus clouds reared themselves. The reports from elsewhere in Japan showed prevalent unfavorable conditions. At Niigata, the station chosen by the Japanese Department of the Interior for locating an observing party, it was raining heavily. We hoped that the blue sky above us might continue to be undivided by the cloudy hosts encamped around. At 1 o'clock, the conditions were apparently most favorable, but suddenly the summit of Nasutake, the volcano fifteen miles to our west, began to pour forth with apparently a hundred-fold energy great masses of steam. A dense cloud formed about the cone, and trailed downward along the flanks of the mountain, and as if to meet the cloud issuing from the bowels of the earth, the clouds far off began to gather. The north grew black. A peal of thunder burst upon the ears. A storm swept by us to the east, a storm swept before us to the south. It was raining everywhere around us, and over our heads the great clouds gathered, floated and lazily wheeled. The moment of first contact came. The sun was invisible. Black misery filled the minds of the party of anxious watchers. Then the clouds began to part, a ray of sunlight shot downward upon the earth and we saw the disk of the great central luminary one fourth eclipsed. The gongs and drums in the town began to sound. The photo-heliograph was brought into requisition. But only for an instant did hope cheer us. The clouds gathered thicker and thicker and at last it was night, a night sudden, awe-inspiring in its descent. The voices of nature were hushed, a wild, confused clamor rose from the thousands who thronged the streets of the town into which the railroad for two days past had been pouring visitors of high and low degree, princes and peasants. A flash of lightning for a moment lit up the gloom of the inky purple folds above our heads. A faint orange glow revealed the northeastern and southwestern horizon. The inky ball of the moon seemed to appear among the wreaths of vapor for an instant; then again as quickly as night had fallen on the earth, it was day again, the shining crescent of the growing sun for an instant appearing in the mists and then vanishing. Immediately overhead was a great blue opening in the sky, but no friendly breeze came to our assistance to move it downward toward the western horizon and let the glory in, but through that window travesmen and peasants a few miles away caught a view of what they could not fully comprehend, but which we had come thousands of miles and had spent thousands of dollars to observe.

If consolation can be derived from the misfortunes of others we have at least a solace in the knowledge that all the observing parties sent out by the Japanese Departments in different directions were even less fortunate than we were. Professor Terao, of the Imperial University, for the third time in his life sat under an umbrella in drenching rain, vainly attempting to see the sun in total eclipse. The Niigata party sent out by the Interior Department report entire failure of their attempts. The only points in Japan where it is reported that the total phase was clearly observed for a few moments were Utsonomiya, where the clouds parted at totality for a brief interval, and Koriyama, where the same phenomenon took place. The former point is on the extreme southern edge of the track of totality and the latter upon its northern boundary. In addition to this, strangely enough, volunteer observers stationed upon the narrow spit of land jutting out into the Pacific just south of Mito, a place unendurable on account of the stenches of the fishing villages, where pilchards by the ton are converted into fertilizers, declare that they had a cloudless sky throughout the entire eclipse. The unexpected always happens.

The net result of the United States Eclipse Expedition to Japan is a few photographs larger than were ever before made of the phases prior to totality; some plates representing the actinic force of the solar light during totality, and a number of curious and interesting observations made before and after the eclipse relating to solar photography and improved methods of accomplishing results in this department.

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