Edward Gauntlett (1868–1956),
English Teacher, Explorer and Missionary

SAIKO GAUNTLETT

Edward Gauntlett

INTRODUCTION

Edward Gauntlett was an outstanding teacher of English who spent over sixty years in Japan. George Edward Luckman Gauntlett was born in Swansea in 1868. He came to Japan in 1890 and taught at various Japanese colleges and schools. He devoted himself principally to teaching English concentrating on commercial English, penmanship and illumination. He also taught Latin and Esperanto. He did much to enhance interest in music (organ), shorthand (both in Japanese and in English), Braille, missionary work, exploration and geography. For his distinguished service to English language education, he was awarded the Fifth Class Order of the Rising Sun in 1909, Fourth Class Small Cordon of the same in 1925 and Third Class Order of the Sacred Treasure in 1953. In 1898, he married Yamada Tsune who later became known as a pioneer feminist, and social and religious worker in Japan. They had two sons and four daughters. After the Second World War, Gauntlett taught English at the Gaimusho’s training institute. He died in 1956 at the age of eighty-seven.
Gauntlett was the second son of John George and Frances Gauntlett. As he was born in Swansea, he felt a special attachment to Wales and used to describe himself as Welsh by reason of his birth in the Principality. There were many church musicians in his family. Both Gauntlett’s elder and younger brothers were Doctors of Music perhaps as a result of the musical training which his father gave to his children. When Gauntlett was born, his father was an acting curate but later became a vicar. The last position he held was that of canon of St David’s Cathedral. His mother died while he was still a boy and the brothers were sent to a boarding school in Brighton. His father then married Elizabeth Stroud, a daughter of Admiral Stroud who also lived in Swansea.

Gauntlett stayed at his school at Brighton for four to five years. He then studied architecture, engineering and art during his employment with Messrs. Bucknall & Jannings, Architects and Engineers, of London, Bristol and Swansea. He studied at a branch school of the South Kensington Science and Art School and acted as a manager for the science and art section of the company. During this time, he took correspondence courses at Chicago University and as a result became an assistant instructor of the branch school. His elder brother went to Oxford and his younger brother to Cambridge but there was no money to send Gauntlett to university and he had to cope on his own resources.

In 1889, when Gauntlett was between twenty and twenty-one, he went to the United States despite the opposition of his parents but was nevertheless given part of the family savings to cover his costs. This decision was probably made because of his thirst for new knowledge and his adventurous spirit. According to the autobiography of Tsuneko, Gauntlett’s wife, Lord Amherst, a cousin of his stepmother was in the United States as a banker, and this had been a factor in his decision to go to the US. Initially, he went to San Francisco but could not find work because of the severe economic conditions prevailing there. Then he went to Seattle where as many buildings had been burnt down in a recent major fire he hoped to find a job. However, his health deteriorated and he was advised to stay away from building work. With his slight build and sensitive character he may also not have found the United States congenial. When his health improved he learnt that English teachers were needed in Japan. He was also asked to join a programme organized by the missionary, C.S. Eby of the Methodist Church of Canada. It is not clear how Gauntlett travelled from the United States to Canada but he came to Japan by way of Toronto. In August 1890, he landed in Yokohama where Lafcadio Hearn had arrived in Japan in April of that year.