

IV.

SIGHTS AND SOUNDS IN A PAGAN TEMPLE.

THE temple of Kuanon at Asakūsa is to Tōkiō what St. Paul's is to London, or Nôtre Dame to Paris. The chief temple of the city, the most popular religious resort, one never sees the Japanese capital till he sees Asakūsa. Like Nôtre Dame, it is ancient, holy, dirty, and grand, with pigeons and priests, and bazaars and book-stalls near by to match.

Asakūsa is now the name of a district of the city, which anciently was a village. The temple is about three miles from the centre of the castle, and two from Nihon Bashi, and at the time of its erection was a remote suburb. It is but a short distance from the river, and Asakūsa bridge and Asakūsa ferry have been made chiefly for the convenience of the pious, gay, and curious, to cross the Sumida River to visit the great temple, gardens, and pleasure-grounds, many acres in extent. These latter a Japanese temple must always have, whether Buddhist or Shintō. In them are fairs, refreshments, booths, eating, smoking, dancing, and every gay sport and pleasure known. To the Japanese mind there is no incongruity in this placing a temple cheek by jowl with a theatre. To cast his cash in the box of offerings, to pray, are but preludes to uproarious mirth or sedate enjoyments. Religion and innocent pleasure join hands in Japan. Are the Japanese wrong in this?

Two grand entrances invite the visitor. One opens to the river. The main approach forms the terminus of an avenue that traverses the city, and joins the broad street fronting Asakūsa at right angles. Up and down this street, on either side, for rods, are restaurants and houses where the famed singing-girls of Tōkiō make music, song, and dance. The path to the temple is of stone, twelve feet wide, with side pavements, upon which are ranged hundreds of booths having on sale a gorgeous abundance of toys, dolls, and every thing to delight the eyes of babydom. Perpetual Christmas reigns here. "Every

street in Paris is like Broadway," said a French mademoiselle to a New York lady. Every day at Asakūsa is a festival; but on the great matsuris, or religious holidays, the throng of gayly dressed humanity of all ages, is astonishing. Every one in Japan has heard of Asakūsa. One never fairly sees open-air Japanese life, except at a matsuri. There is nothing strange, however, to the Japanese mind in this association of temples and toy-shops. The good bonzes in their sermons declare, as the result of their exegesis and meditations, that husbands are bound to love their wives, and show it by allowing them plenty of pin-money and hair-pins, and to be not bitter against them by denying them neat dresses and handsome girdles. The farmer who comes to town with his daughter, turns from prayer to the purchase of pomatum or a mirror. Every sort of toy, game, hair-ornaments in illimitable variety; combs, rare and beautiful, and cheap and plain; crapes for the neck and bosom; all kinds of knickknacks, notions, and varieties are here; besides crying babies; strings of beads

for prayer; gods of lead, brass, and wood; shrines and family altars, sanctums, prayer-books, sacred bells, and candles.

Chapels and special shrines, many of them the expiatory gifts of rich sinners, lie back of the booths on each side of the roadway. On their walls hang votive tablets and pictures of various sorts. In one of the booths, an old artist, with his two brushes in one hand, is painting one. His cheap productions will sell

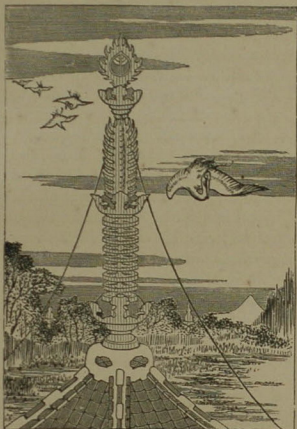


Artist at Work.

for five or ten cents. He looks as though he were laughing at his own joke, for his subject is a pictorial pun on the word "fool" (*baka*: *ba*, a horse; *ka*, a stag).*

* The allusion is to the act of the Chinese prime minister at the court of the Chinese emperor, who was the son of the illustrious builder of the Great Wall. He declared that a stag could be called a horse, and a horse a stag. The courtiers were compelled to obey him. This is the origin of the Japanese word *baka*, which the Japanese urchins sometimes cry at foreigners, and one of the first words the latter learn to throw at the natives. The particular digital gesture of sticking the left forefinger in the left side of the mouth is the Japanese equivalent of the soliloquy, "What a fool I am!" or the interrogation, "You think I'm a fool, don't

mouths, preparatory to worship. A pagoda rises to the right with its seven stories, its heavy eaves fringed with wind-bells, its beams tipped with carvings, and its roof



Pagoda Spire, or Kiu-do. (Nishiki-yé.)

terminating into a projection called the *kiu-do* (nine rings), resembling an enormous copper turning just rolled from the lathe, or a corkscrew such as might be used to uncork a columbiad. To climb to the top is to run the risk of dislocating the neck, and the view does not repay. In time of severe earthquake, this pagoda spire will vibrate like a plume on a helmet. Of course, in the picture, the artist must bring in the snow-white cranes, and Fuji. On the top is the jewel, or sacred pearl, so conspicuous in Japanese art and symbolism, and which, on the coins and paper money, the dragon ever clutches in his talons.

On my left stands a large plain frame of wood, on which hang talies, or tablets, inscribed with names and sums of money. They are those of subscribers to the temple, and the amount of their contributions. One, five, and ten dollars are common gifts, and the one hundred-dollar donor is honored with a larger amount of shingle to advertise his religion. Several old women have stands, at which they sell holy beans, pious pease, and sanctified rice. These are kept ready in tiny earthen saucers. The orthodox buy these, and fling them to the cloud of pigeons that are waiting on the temple eaves, and fly, whirring down, to feed. Ten thousand sunbeams flash from their opaline necks as their pink feet move coquettishly over the ground. Two enormous upright bronze lanterns on stone pedestals flank the path, and on these flocks of pigeons quickly rise and settle again. These pigeons have their home, not only without but within the tem-

ple, over the very altars of Great Shaka. Even the pigeon hath found a rest where she may lay her young, even thine altars, Great Shaka. Their cooing blends with the murmurs of prayer, and the whirring of their wings with the chant of the bonzes.

Besides the pigeons, there are two sacred Albino ponies kept in a stable to the left. They are consecrated to the presiding deity, Kuanon, Goddess of Mercy. A young girl has the care of them, and they are fed by the pious, who, as a religious and meritorious act, buy the beans and pease with which the animals are fed.

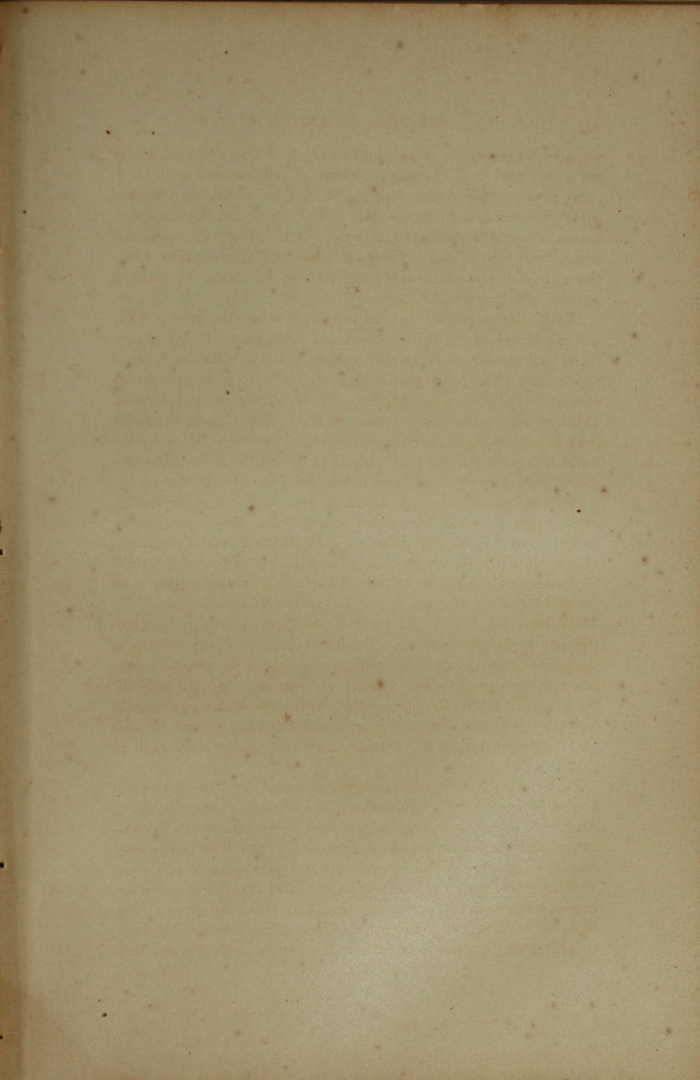
The most imposing feature of a Japanese temple is the roof of massive black tiles, sweeping up in a parabolic curve of the immense surface, which make enormous gables at the side. One is impressed with the solidity of the timbers and supports, which are set firmly but loosely in stone sockets, and defy the earthquake in a manner that recalls Æsop's fable of the oak and the reed. We ascend the broad copper-edged steps to the broader porch, and are on the threshold of the great pagan temple, so holy, so noisy, so dirty. Within its penetralium, we try to feel reverent. How can we, with a crowd of eager, curious, dirty faces, with dirty babies behind them, with unclean pigeons whirring above us to the threatened detriment of our hats? Within is a chaos of votive tablets, huge lanterns, shrines, idols, spit-balls, smells, dust, dirt, nastiness, and holiness. Immediately within the door stands a huge bronze censer, with a hideous beast rampant upon it. He seems maddened by the ascending clouds of irritating incense that puff out of numerous holes around the edge. The worshipers, as they enter, drop an iron or copper cash in the lap of the black-toothed crone who keeps the sacred fuel, put a pinch in one of the holes, and pass in front of the altar to pray. Around the top of the censer are the twelve signs of the Japanese zodiac, in high relief. These are the rat, ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, serpent, horse, goat, monkey, cock, dog, hog.

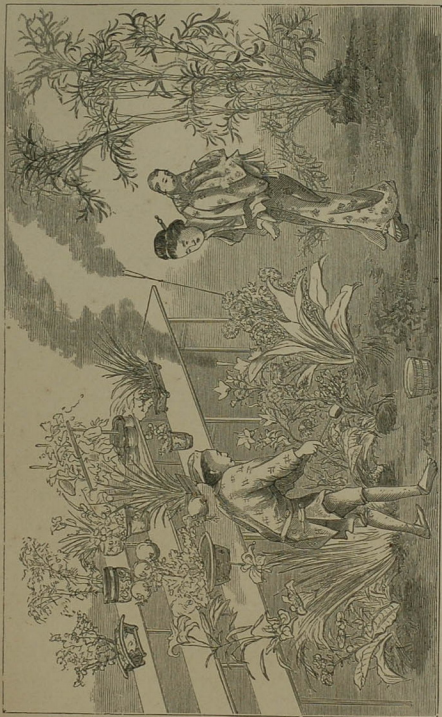
The great main altar is protected in front by an iron wire screen. Each worshiper, before praying, makes a "heave-offering" of a handful of cash into the huge coffer before the altar. Occasionally one, with pious intent, throws what we would call a spit-ball at the screen. What an idea! The worshiper writes out his petition, chews it to a pulp in his mouth, and throws it at the idol. If it sticks, the omen is good, the prayer is heard. Hearing, then, depends on the softness of the mass, or the salival ability and dexterity of the thrower. Some of the images in the outer shrines are speckled all over with these out-

spittings of pious mouths. The coins and balls might injure the altar furniture and golden idols, if not protected.

The space opposite the altar is filled by praying people of every sort. Mothers, maidens, and children, old men and boys, samurai and merchant and farmer, country boors, city swells, soldiers in French uniform with sword-bayonets at their side, *à la Paris*, all fling the coin, bow the head, rub the hands above the head. Many use strings of beads, like the Roman Catholics. Prayers at the main altar over, the devotee may visit one or more of the many side shrines within the building. To the right sits the ugly and worn-out god Binzuru (one of Buddha's original sixteen disciples), reputed to cure diseases. There is a mother with two children rubbing the dirty old wooden head and limbs, and then applying the supposed virtue to their own bodies by rubbing them. The old idol is polished greasy and black by the attrition of many thousand palms. His nose, ears, eyes, and mouth have long since disappeared. We warrant that more people are infected than cured by their efforts.

To the left is a shrine, covered in front by a lattice, to the bars of which are tied thousands of slips of paper containing written prayers. Flanking the coffer on either side are old men who sell charms, printed prayers, beads, prayer-books, and ecclesiastical wares of all sorts. Votive tablets are hung on the walls and huge round pillars. Here is one, on which is the character, cut from paper, for "man" and "woman," joined by a padlock, from a pair of lovers, who hope and pray that the course of true love may run smooth, and finally flow like a river. Here is one from a merchant who promises a gift to the temple if his venture succeeds. Scores are memorials of gratitude to Kuanon for hearing prayer and restoring the suppliant to health. The subject of one picture is the boiler explosion on the steamboat *City of Yedo*, which took place in front of the foreign hotel in Tsükiji, August 12th, 1870, in which one hundred lives were lost. Only a few days ago, in Yokohama, I saw the infant son of the Rev. Mr. and Mrs. Cornes, my fellow-country people, who, with a little English girl, were the only foreigners killed. The devotee was saved by the great mercy of Kuanon, and hangs up the tablet, as a witness of his gratitude, and Kuanon's surpassing favor. Many are from sailors who have survived a storm. On the wire screen hang scores of men's greasy top-knots, and a few braids of women's hair, cut off on account of vows, and offered to the honor of Kuanon. Perhaps the deity sees the heart that made the offering, and not the rancid and mildewed grease. Above





A Flower Fair at Night in Tōkiō. (Drawn by Nankoku Ōzawa.)

An open chrysanthemum, the crest of the emperor, is emblazoned on all the barracks of the soldiers, on their caps, buttons, and banners, and on all buildings devoted to governmental purposes.

In the cultivation of these flowers the native gardeners excel. In their limited specialties, the Japanese florists distance those of any other country. The borders of the Asakūsa gardens are made of clipped tea-plants. Dwarfing, unnatural local enlargement, variegation of leaf and petal, the encouragement of freaks of nature by careful artificial selection—these are the specialties of the natives of Nippon, which have been perfected by the hereditary patience, tact, and labor of a thousand years. The guild of florists in Tōkiō is large and wealthy. As the florist father, so is the son. Some of the streets of the city are noted for their floral displays and fairs. These are often given at night, the street being lighted by candles, as in the picture.

The temple and the gardens are not the only sights at Asakūsa. The antiquary may revel in deciphering the scores of inscriptions in Sanskrit, Japanese, and Chinese. Most of these are commemorative of religious events; some are prayers, some are quotations from canonical books, some are sacred hymns. The stones are of granite, of slate, and of gray-stone. Bronze and stone images of Buddha are numerous; some with aureole, and finger lifted; some with hands or legs crossed, and thumbs joined meditatively. All wear the serene countenance of the sage in Nirvana. Around the base of nearly all are heaps of pebbles, placed there as evidence of prayers offered. In one shrine little earthen pots of salt are placed as offerings. A "praying machine"—a stone wheel in a stone post—stands near. In one octagon temple are ranged the stone effigies of the five hundred original disciples of Buddha. Again we light on a crowd of stone idols, on which are pasted bits of paper, containing a picture or a prayer. Some of them are as full of labels as an apothecary's shop. Many have smoking incense-sticks before them, stuck in a bed of ashes accumulated from former offerings. In one building to the south-east of the main temple is a curious collection of idols, which attract attention from the fact of their being clean.

Three idols, representing assistant torturers to Ema, the Lord of Hell, painted in all colors and gilded as gorgeously as cheap gingerbread, stand in theatrical attitudes. One wields a sword, one a pen, and one a priest's staff. All have their heads in an aureole of red flames. The feet of the first, a green monster like a deified caterpillar, rests his foot on an imp of the same color, having two clawed toes on

Kuanon is drawn out in public to stay a plague, which is accomplished by the mercy and favor of the god. In the first tableau inside, a learned lady prays to Kuanon, and is heard. The second tableau represents Kuanon appearing in the form of a beautiful woman to reward a diligent priest; the third, a young girl suddenly restored to health by the favor of Kuanon; the fourth, Kuanon appearing in the form of a little peasant girl to a noble of the mikado's court; the fifth, a hungry robber desecrating the temple; and a certain suggestive painting to the left, in which demons and a red-hot cart, with wheels and axles of fire, are pictured above the robber, tells what is to become of him. In the sixth, a noble of the mikado's court overcomes and binds the thunder-god, or demon, through the power of Kuanon. In the seventh, a woman is saved from shipwreck because she sung a hymn to Kuanon during the tempest. In the eighth, a devout priest, fearing yet bold, goes to talk to Ema, the Lord of Hell. The ninth represents an old man, one of the Hōjō family, writing a prayer-poem. The tenth represents a pious damsel, who worshiped Kuanon, never killed any animals, and saved the life of a crab which a man was going to kill: afterward, a snake, transforming itself into human shape, came to seize her, but a multitude of grateful crabs appeared and rescued her, biting the reptile to death: this was by the order of Kuanon. In the eleventh, a devout worshiper, by prayer, overcomes and kills a huge serpent that troubled the neighborhood. In the twelfth, a diligent copyist of the sacred books beguiles his time by rewarding little children with cakes for bringing him pebbles, for every one of which he transcribes a character. The baby on the back of the little girl is asleep; and the imitation of baby-life is wonderful, and in respect to one or two details more truthful than elegant. In the thirteenth, Kuanon, having appeared on earth in female form, goes to heaven, taking the picture of a boy, who afterward grows up to be a celebrated priest. In the fourteenth, a pious woman falls from a ladder, but is unhurt. In the fifteenth, a man suffering grievously from headache is directed to the spot where the skull which belonged to his body in a previous state of existence is being split open by the root of a tree growing through the eye-socket. On removing it, he is relieved of his headache. In the nineteenth, a good man vanquishes a robber. In the twentieth, the babe of a holy farmer's wife, who is out at work, is saved from a wolf by miraculous rays defending the child. In the twenty-first, Kuanon appears to heal a sick girl with a wand and drops of water. In the twenty-second, a holy man buys and sets

free a tortoise about to be killed for food. Three days afterward his child falls overboard, and is apparently lost, but after a while returns safely on the back of the grateful reptile. In the twenty-fourth, a retainer of a noble is ordered to kill his master's son for disobedience to him. The servant, unable, through love of his master's son, to do it, kills his own son instead. The tableau represents him mourning over his son's gory head. His master's son, in remorse, became a priest. In the twenty-fifth, a good man is saved from robbers by his dog. In the twenty-sixth, a man who had his cargo of rice confiscated for his refusal to give the priest his share, repented of his obduracy, and received heavenly evidence of his pardon in a new cargo of rice sent by Kuanon. In the twenty-seventh, the son of a court noble breaks a precious ink-stone. His father, in a fit of anger, kills him. The horrified attendant becomes a priest. In the twenty-eighth, a pious recluse is saved from starvation by a miraculous leg of venison. In the twenty-ninth, a mountain demon pursues an evil-doer. In the thirtieth, a pious wood-cutter hears heavenly music, and Kuanon appears to him. In the thirty-first, a worshiper of Kuanon is wounded by robbers, thrown into the river, and is accidentally brought up in a fisherman's net. Having an image of Kuanon in his bosom, he is resuscitated, and lives to bless his preserver. In the thirty-third, a mermaid appears to a passer-by, and prays him to erect a temple to Kuanon. This having been done, the mermaid is reborn into a higher state of existence. In the thirty-fourth, Kuanon appears to a traveler. The last is a moving tableau, representing a court noble and lady.

Extreme kindness to animals is characteristic of the Japanese. It is the result of the gentle doctrines of Buddha. Several of the miracle-figures teach the law of kindness to brutes. It is sometimes carried into a sentimentalism almost maudlin. My jin-riki-sha puller makes a détour, out of his way, round a sleeping dog or bantam, when the lazy animal might fairly take its chances. When a man believes that the soul of his grandfather may be transmigrating through a cur, however mangy, or a chick, however skinny, he is not going to cause another metempsychosis by murdering the brute, if he can help it. Killing a wounded horse to put him out of misery, or in useless old age, is never practiced, the idea being too cruel to be entertained.