

## X.

## CHILDREN'S GAMES AND SPORTS.\*

THE aim of the Asiatic Society of Japan is, as I understand it, to endeavor to attain any and all knowledge of the Japanese country and people. Nothing that will help us to understand them is foreign to the objects of this society. While language, literature, art, religion, the drama, household superstitions, etc., furnish us with objects worthy of study, the games and sports of the children deserve our notice. For, as we believe, their amusements reflect the more serious affairs and actions of mature life. They are the foretastes and the prophecies of adult life which children see continually; not always understanding, but ever ready to imitate it. Hence in the toy-shops of Japan one may see the microcosm of Japanese life. In the children's sports is enacted the miniature drama of the serious life of the parents. Among a nation of players such as the Japanese may be said to have been, it is not always easy to draw the line of demarkation between the diversions of children proper and those of a larger growth. Indeed, it might be said that during the last two centuries and a half, previous to the coming of foreigners, the main business of this nation was play. One of the happiest phrases in Mr. Alcock's book is that "Japan is a paradise of babies;" he might have added, that it was also a very congenial abode for all who love play. The contrast between the Chinese and Japanese character in this respect is radical. It is laid down in one of the very last sentences in the *Tri-metrical Classic*, the primer of every school in the Flowery Land, that play is unprofitable! The whole character, manners, and even the dress, of the sedate and dignified Chinamen, seem to be in keeping with that aversion to rational amusement and athletic exercises which characterizes that adult population.

In Japan, on the contrary, one sees that the children of a larger

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growth enjoy with equal zest games which are the same, or nearly the same, as those of lesser size and fewer years. Certain it is that the adults do all in their power to provide for the children their full quota of play and harmless sports. We frequently see full-grown and able-bodied natives indulging in amusements which the men of the West lay aside with their pinafores, or when their curls are cut. If we, in the conceited pride of our superior civilization, look down upon this as childish, we must remember that the Celestial, from the pinnacle of his lofty and, to him, immeasurably elevated civilization, looks down upon our manly sports with contempt, thinking it a condescension even to notice them.

A very noticeable change has passed over the Japanese people since the modern advent of foreigners, in respect of their love of amusements. Their sports are by no means as numerous or elaborate as formerly, and they do not enter into them with the enthusiasm that formerly characterized them. The children's festivals and sports are rapidly losing their importance, and some now are rarely seen. Formerly the holidays were almost as numerous as saints' days in the calendar. Apprentice-boys had a liberal quota of holidays stipulated in their indentures; and as the children counted the days before each great holiday on their fingers, we may believe that a great deal of digital arithmetic was being continually done. We do not know of any country in the world in which there are so many toy-shops, or so many fairs for the sale of the things which delight children. Not only are the streets of every city abundantly supplied with shops, filled as full as a Christmas stocking with gaudy toys, but in small towns and villages one or more children's bazaars may be found. The most gorgeous



display of all things pleasing to the eye of a Japanese child is found in the courts or streets leading to celebrated temples. On a matsuri, or festival day, the toy-sellers and itinerant showmen throng with their most attractive wares or sights in front of the shrine or temple. On the walls and in conspicuous places near the churches and cathedrals in Europe and America, the visitor is usually regaled with the sight of undertakers' signs and grave-diggers' advertisements. How differently the Japanese act in these respects, let any one see by visiting Asakusa, Kanda Miōjin, or one of the numerous Inari shrines in Tōkiō on some great festival day.

We have not space in this chapter to name or describe the numerous street-shows and showmen who are supposed to be interested mainly in entertaining children; though in reality adults form a part, often the major part, of their audiences. Any one desirous of seeing these in full glory must ramble down Yanagi Chō (Willow Street), from Sujikai, in Tōkiō, on some fair day, and especially on a general holiday.

Among the most common are the street theatricals, in which two, three, or four trained boys and girls do some very creditable acting, chiefly in comedy. Raree-shows, in which the looker-on sees the inside splendors of a daimio's yashiki, or the fascinating scenes of the Yoshiwara, or some famous natural scenery, are very common. The showman, as he pulls the wires that change the scenes, entertains the spectators with songs. The outside of his box is usually adorned with pictures of famous actors or courtesans, nine-tailed foxes, devils of all colors, drowsical badgers, and wrathful husbands butchering faithless wives and their paramours, or some such staple horror in which the normal Japanese so delights. Story-tellers, posturers, dancers, actors of charades, conjurers, flute-players, song-singers are found on these streets; but those who specially delight the children are the men who, by dint of breath and fingers, work a paste made of wheat-gluten into all sorts of curious and gayly smeared toys, such as flowers, trees, noblemen, fair ladies, various utensils, the "hairy foreigner," the same with a cigar in his mouth, the jin-riki-sha, etc. Nearly every itinerant seller of candy, starch-cakes, sugared pease, and sweetened beans, has several methods of lottery by which he adds to the attractions on his stall. A disk having a revolving arrow, whirled round by the hand of a child, or a number of strings which are connected with the faces of imps, goddesses, devils, or heroes, lends the excitement of chance, and, when a lucky pull or whirl occurs, occasions

the subsequent addition to the small fraction of a cent's worth to be bought. Men or women itinerants carry a small charcoal brazier under a copper griddle, with batter, spoons, cups, and shoyu sauce, to hire out for the price of a cash each to the little urchins, who spend an afternoon of bliss making their own griddle-cakes and eating them. The seller of sugar-jelly exhibits a devil, taps a drum, and dances for the benefit of his baby-customers. The seller of mochi does the same, with the addition of gymnastics and skillful tricks with balls of dough. The fire-eater rolls balls of camphor paste glowing with lambent fire over his arms, and then extinguishes them in his mouth. The bug-man harnesses paper carts to the backs of beetles with wax, and a half-dozen in this gear will drag a load of rice up an inclined plane. The man with the magic swimming birds tips his tiny water-fowl with camphor, and floats them in a long narrow dish full of water. The wooden toys, propelled from side to side and end to end by the dissolving gum, act as if alive, to the widening eyes of the young spectators. In every Japanese city there are scores, if not hundreds, of men and women who obtain a livelihood by amusing the children.

Some of the games of Japanese children are of a national character, and are indulged in by all classes. Others are purely local or exclusive. Among the former are those which belong to the special days, or matsuri, which in the old calendars enjoyed vastly more importance than under the new one. Beginning with the first of the year, there are a number of games and sports peculiar to this time. The girls, dressed in their best robes and girdles, with their faces powdered and their lips painted, until they resemble the peculiar colors seen on a beetle's wings, and their hair arranged in the most attractive coiffure, are out upon the street, playing battledore and shuttlecock. They play, not only in twos and threes, but also in circles. The shuttlecock is a round seed, often gilded, stuck round with feathers arranged like the petals of a flower. The battledore is a wooden bat; one side of which is of bare wood, while the other has the raised effigy of some popular actor, hero of romance, or singing-girl in the most ultra-Japanese style of beauty. The girls evidently highly appreciate this game, as it gives abundant opportunity to the display of personal beauty, figure, and dress. Those who fail in the game often have their faces marked with ink, or a circle drawn round their eyes. The boys sing a song that the wind may blow; the girls sing that it may be calm, so that their shuttlecocks may fly straight. The little girls, at this time,

play with a ball made of cotton cord, covered elaborately with many strands of bright varicolored silk.

Inside the house, they have games suited, not only for the day-time, but for the evenings. Many foreigners have wondered what the Japanese do at night, and how the long winter evenings are spent. On fair and especially moonlight nights, most of the people are out-of-doors, and many of the children with them. Markets and fairs are held regularly at night in Tōkiō, and in the other large cities. The foreigner living in a Japanese city, even if he were blind, could tell, by stepping out-of-doors, whether the weather were clear and fine or disagreeable. On dark and stormy nights, the stillness of a great city like Tōkiō is unbroken and very impressive; but on a fair and moonlight night, the hum and bustle tell one that the people are out in throngs, and make one feel that it is a city that he lives in. In most of the castle towns in Japan, it was formerly the custom of the people, especially of the younger, to assemble on moonlight nights in the streets or open spaces near the castle-gates, and dance a sort of subdued dance, moving round in circles and clapping their hands. These dances often continued during the entire night, the following day being largely consumed in sleep. In the winter evenings, in Japanese households the children amuse themselves with their sports, or are amused by their elders, who tell them entertaining stories. The samurai father relates to his son Japanese history and heroic lore, to fire him with enthusiasm and a love of those achievements which every samurai youth hopes at some day to perform. Then there are numerous social entertainments, at which the children above a certain age are allowed to be present. But the games relied on as standard means of amusement, and seen especially about New-year's, are those of cards. In one of these, a large, square sheet of paper is laid on the floor. On this card are the names and pictures of the fifty-three post-stations between Tōkiō and Kiōto. At the place Kiōto are put a few coins, or a pile of cakes, or some such prizes, and the game is played with dice. Each throw advances the player toward the goal, and the one arriving first obtains the prize. At this time of the year also, the games of cards called, respectively, Iroha Garuta (Alphabet Cards), Hiyaku Nin Isshiu Garuta (One-Verse-of-One-Hundred-Poets Cards), Kokin Garuta, Genji, and Shi Garuta are played a great deal. The Iroha Garuta (Karūta is the Japanized form of the Dutch *Karte*, English *card*) are small cards, each containing a proverb. The proverb is printed on one card, and the picture illustrating it upon another. Each proverb begins

with a certain one of the fifty Japanese letters, *i, ro, ha*, etc., and so on through the syllabary. The children range themselves in a circle, and the cards are shuffled and dealt. One is appointed to be reader. Looking at his cards, he reads the proverb. The player who has the picture corresponding to the proverb calls out, and the match is made. Those who are rid of their cards first win the game. The one holding the last card is the loser. If he be a boy, he has his face marked curiously with ink. If a girl, she has a paper or wisp of straw stuck in her hair.

The Hiaku Nin Isshiu Garuta game consists of two hundred cards, on which are inscribed the one hundred stanzas, or poems, so celebrated and known in every household. A stanza of Japanese poetry usually consists of two parts, a first and second, or upper and lower clause. The manner of playing the game is as follows: The reader reads half the stanza on his card, and the player having the card on which the other half is written calls out, and makes a match. Some children become so familiar with these poems that they do not need to hear the entire half of the stanza read, but frequently only the first word.

The Kokin Garuta, or the game of Ancient Odes, the Genji Garuta, named after the celebrated Genji (Minamoto) family of the Middle Ages, and the Shi Garuta are all card-games of a similar nature, but can be thoroughly enjoyed only by well-educated Chinese scholars, as the references and quotations are written in Chinese, and require a good knowledge of the Chinese and Japanese classics to play them well. To boys who are eager to become proficient in Chinese, it often acts as an incentive to be told that they will enjoy these games after certain attainments in scholarship have been made. Having made these attainments, they play the game frequently, especially during vacation, to impress on their minds what they have already learned. The same benefit to the memory accrues from the Iroha and Hiakunin Isshiu Garuta.

Two other games are played which may be said to have an educational value. They are the Chiye no Ita and the Chiye no Wa, or the "Wisdom Boards" and the "Ring of Wisdom." The former consists of a number of flat, thin pieces of wood, cut in many geometrical shapes. Certain possible figures are printed on paper as models, and the boy tries to form them out of the pieces given him. In some cases, much time and thinking are required to form the figure. The Chiye no Wa is a ring-puzzle, made of rings of bamboo or iron on a

bar. Boys having a talent for mathematics, or those who have a natural capacity to distinguish size and form, succeed very well at these



games, and enjoy them. The game of checkers is played on a raised stand or table, about six inches in height. The number of *go*, or checkers, including black and white, is three hundred and sixty. In the *Sho-gi*, or game of chess, the pieces number forty in all. Backgammon is also a favorite play, and there are several forms of it. About the time of the old New-year's, when the winds of February and March are favorable to the sport, kites are flown; and there are few sports in which Japanese boys, from the infant on the back to the full-grown and the over-grown boy, take more delight. I have never observed, however, as foreign books so often tell us, old men flying kites, and boys merely looking on. The Japanese kites are made of tough paper pasted on a frame of bamboo sticks, and are usually of a rectangular shape. Some of them, however, are made to represent children or men, several kinds of birds and animals, fans, etc. On the rectangular kites are pictures of ancient heroes or beautiful women, dragons, horses, monsters of various kinds, or huge Chinese characters. Among the faces most frequently seen on these kites are those of Yoshitsuné, Kintarō, Yoritomo, Benké, Daruma, Tomoyé, and Hangaku. Some of the kites are six feet square. Many of them have a thin tense ribbon of whalebone at the top of the kite, which vibrates in the wind, making a loud, humming noise. The boys frequently name their kites *Genji* or *Heiké*, and each contestant endeavors to destroy that of his rival. For this purpose, the string, for ten or twenty feet near the kite end, is first covered with glue, and then dipped into pounded glass, by which the string becomes

covered with tiny blades, each able to cut quickly and deeply. By getting the kite in proper position, and suddenly sawing the string of his antagonist, the severed kite falls, to be reclaimed by the victor.

The Japanese tops are of several kinds; some are made of univalve shells, filled with wax. Those intended for contests are made of hard wood, and are iron-clad by having a heavy iron ring round as a sort of tire. The boys wind and throw them in a manner somewhat different from ours. The object of the player is to damage his adversary's top, or to make it cease spinning. The whipping-top is also known and used. Besides the athletic sports of leaping, running, wrestling, slinging, the Japanese boys play at blind-man's-buff, hiding-whoop, and with stilts, pop-guns, and blow-guns. On stilts they play various games and run races.

In the Northern and Western coast provinces, where the snow falls to the depth of many feet and remains long on the ground, it forms the material of the children's playthings, and the theatre of many of their sports. Besides sliding on the ice, coasting with sleds, building snow-forts, and fighting mimic battles with snow-balls, they make many kinds of images and imitations of what they see and know. In America the boy's snow-man is a Paddy with a damaged hat, clay pipe in mouth, and the shillalah in his hand. In Japan the snow-man is an image of Daruma. Daruma was one of the followers of Shaka (Buddha) who, by long meditation in a squatting position, lost his legs from paralysis and sheer decay. The images of Daruma are found by the hundreds in toy-shops, as tobacconists' signs and as the snow-men of the boys. Occasionally the figure of Geiho, the sage with a forehead and skull so high that a ladder was required to reach his





pate, or huge cats and the peculiar-shaped dogs seen in the toy-shops, take the place of Daruma.

Many of the amusements of the children indoors are mere imitations of the serious affairs of adult life. Boys who have been to the theatre come home to imitate the celebrated actors, and to extemporize mimic theatricals for themselves. Feigned sickness and "playing the doctor," imitating with ludicrous exactness the pomp and solemnity of the real man of pills and powders, and the misery of the patient, are the diversions of very young children. Diners, tea-parties, and even weddings and funerals, are imitated in Japanese children's plays.

Among the ghostly games intended to test the courage of, or perhaps to frighten, children, are two plays called respectively "Hiyaku Monogatari" and "Kon-daméshi," or the "One Hundred Stories" and "Soul-examination." In the former play a company of boys and girls assemble round the hibachi, while they, or an adult, an aged person or a servant, usually relate ghost-stories, or tales calculated to straighten the hair and make the blood crawl. In a distant dark room, a lamp (the usual dish of oil), with a wick of one hundred strands or piths, is set. At the conclusion of each story, the children in turn must go to the dark room and remove a strand of the wick. As the lamp burns down low, the room becomes gloomy and dark, and the last boy, it is said, always sees a demon, a huge face, or something terrible. In the "Kon-daméshi" or "Soul-examination," a number of boys, during the day plant some flags in different parts of a graveyard, under a lonely tree, or by a haunted hill-side. At night, they meet together, and tell stories about ghosts, goblins, devils, etc.; and at the conclusion of each tale, when the imagination is wrought up, the hair begins to rise and the marrow to curdle, the boys, one at a time, must go out in the dark and bring back the flags, until all are brought in.

On the third day of the third month is held the "Hina matsuri." This is the day especially devoted to the girls, and to them it is the greatest day in the year. It has been called, in some foreign works on Japan, the "Feast of Dolls." Several days before the matsuri, the shops are gay with the images bought for this occasion, and which are on sale only at this time of year. Every respectable family has a number of these splendidly dressed images, which are from four inches to a foot in height, and which accumulate from generation to generation. When a daughter is born in the house during the previ-



The Feast of Dolls. A Japanese Home on the Third Day of the Third Month. (Drawn by Nankoku Ozawa.)



ous year, a pair of hina, or images, are purchased for the little girl, which she plays with until grown up. When she is married, her hina are taken with her to her husband's house, and she gives them to her children, adding to the stock as her family increases. The images are made of wood or enameled clay. They represent the mikado and his wife; the Kiôto nobles, their wives and daughters, the court minstrels, and various personages in Japanese mythology and history. A great many other toys, representing all the articles in use in a Japanese lady's chamber, the service of the eating-table, the utensils of the kitchen, traveling apparatus, etc., some of them very elaborate and costly, are also exhibited and played with on this day. The girls make offerings of saké and dried rice, etc., to the effigies of the emperor and empress, and then spend the day with toys, mimicking the whole round of Japanese female life, as that of child, maiden, wife, mother, and grandmother. In some old Japanese families in which I have visited, the display of dolls and images was very large.

The greatest day in the year for the boys is on the Fifth day of the Fifth month. On this day is celebrated what has been called the "Feast of Flags." Previous to the coming of the day, the shops display for sale the toys and tokens proper to the occasion. These are all of a kind suited to young Japanese masculinity. They consist of effigies of heroes and warriors, generals and commanders, soldiers on foot and horse, the genii of strength and valor, wrestlers, etc. The toys represent the equipments and regalia of a daimiô's procession, all kinds of things used in war, the contents of an arsenal, flags, streamers, banners, etc. A set of these toys is bought for every son born in the family. Hence, in old Japanese families, the display on the Fifth day of the Fifth month is extensive and brilliant. Besides the display indoors, on a bamboo pole erected outside is hung, by a string, to the top of the pole, a representation of a large fish in paper. The paper being hollow, the breeze easily fills out the body of the fish, which flaps its tail and fins in a natural manner. One may count hundreds of these floating in the air over the city.

The *nobori*, as the paper fish is called, is intended to show that a son has been born during the year, or, at least, that there are sons in the family. The fish represented is the carp, which is able to swim swiftly against the current and to leap over water-falls. This act of the carp is a favorite subject with native artists, and is also typical of the young man, especially the young samurai, mounting over all difficulties to success and quiet prosperity.

One favorite game, which has now gone out of fashion, was that in which the boys formed themselves into a daimiō's procession, having



forerunners, officers, etc., and imitating, as far as possible, the pomp and circumstance of the old daimiō's train. Another game which was very popular was called the "Genji and Heiké." These are the names of the celebrated rival clans, or families, Minamoto and Taira. The boys of a town, district, or school ranged themselves into two parties, each with flags. Those of the Heiké were red, those of the Genji white. Sometimes every boy had a flag, and the object of the contest, which was begun at the tap of a drum, was to seize the flags of the enemy. The party securing the greatest number of flags won the victory. In other cases, the flags were fastened on the back of each contestant, who was armed with a bamboo for a sword, and who had fastened, on a pad over his head, a flat, round piece of earthenware, so that a party of them looked not unlike the faculty of a college. Often these parties of boys numbered several hundred, and were marshaled in squadrons, as in a battle. At the given signal, the battle commenced, the object being to break the earthen disk on the head of the enemy. The contest was usually very exciting. Whoever had his earthen disk demolished had to retire from the field. The party having the greatest number of broken disks, representative of cloven skulls, was declared the loser. This game has been forbidden by the Government as being too severe and cruel. Boys were often injured in it.

There are many other games, which we simply mention without describing. There are three games played by the hands, which every observant foreigner, long resident in Japan, must have seen played, as men and women seem to enjoy them as much as children. One is called "Ishiken," in which a stone, a pair of scissors, and a

wrapping-cloth are represented. The stone signifies the clenched fist, the parted fore and middle finger the scissors, and the curved forefinger and thumb the cloth.

In the "Kitsuné-ken," the fox, man, and gun are the figures. The gun kills the fox, but the fox deceives the man, and the gun is useless without the man. In the "Osama-ken," five or six boys represent the various grades of rank, from the peasant up to the great daimiō, or shōgun. By superior address and skill in the game, the peasant rises to the highest rank, or the man of highest rank is degraded.

From the nature of the Japanese language, in which a single word or sound may have a great many significations, riddles and puns are of extraordinary frequency. I do not know of any published collections of riddles, but every Japanese boy has a good stock of them on hand. There are few Japanese works of light, perhaps of serious, literature in which puns do not continually recur. The popular songs and poems are largely plays on words. There are also several puzzles played with sticks, founded upon the shape of certain Chinese characters. As for the short and simple story-books, song-books, nursery-rhymes, lullabys, and what, for want of a better name, may be styled Mother Goose literature, they are as plentiful as with us; but they have a very strongly characteristic Japanese flavor, both in style and matter. In the games, so familiar to us, of "Pussy wants a Corner" and "Prisoner's Base," the *oni*, or devil, takes the place of Puss or the officer.

I have not mentioned all the games and sports of Japanese children, but enough has been said to show their usual character. In general, they seem to be natural, sensible, and in every sense beneficial. Their immediate or remote effect, next to that of amusement, is either educational or hygienic. Some teach history, some geography, some excellent sentiments or good language, or inculcate reverence and obedience to the elder brother or sister, to parents or to the emperor, or stimulate the manly virtues of courage and contempt for pain. The study of the subject leads one to respect more highly, rather than otherwise, the Japanese people for being such affectionate fathers and mothers, and for having such natural and docile children. The character of the children's plays and their encouragement by the parents have, I think, much to do with that frankness, affection, and obedience on the part of the children, and that kindness and sympathy on that of the parents, which are so noticeable in Japan, and which form one of the good points of Japanese life and character.