

PLEASANT HOURS

PAPER FOR OUR YOUNG FOLK.

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JAPANESE SCHOOL IN THE OLDEN TIME.

HOLIDAYS IN JAPAN.

In December all houses are washed and cleansed more than usual, and the people make of rice something like cake, called *mo-ki*, which is to be eaten when New Year's Day comes. At the very close of the month, bamboos, which are tall and perfectly straight, and also pine trees, are placed at each entrance of the houses to welcome the new year. The reason for using the bamboos and pine trees for an ornament of the new year is that a blessing may come to each family, that the gifts and safety of the past year may continue, just as the trees never lose their leaves in autumn, but are green and beautiful when cold winter comes.

In this way the first day of the new year is welcomed. Boys play with kites; girls with battledores and shuttlecocks. All rest on that day from labour, even the seller and buyer. On the second day all begin to work for a little while for a blessing on work; boys and girls study for a few minutes and then play again. People visit their acquaintances to express thanks for the kindness of last year and ask a blessing on the new year.

The third day of March is a holiday for girls. On this day two dolls which represent the emperor and empress, as they appeared in the early period, are put on something like a table which has many steps, and there a feast is offered on a very beautiful table on which are cups, plates, and tea-

cups. This custom is taken from early history.

The fifth of May is the holiday for boys. Those who have boys in a family make a very large carp of paper. The number of carps is increased according to the number of boys. These are floated beautifully, high up in the air, suspended by a column, just as a flag is. The carps of paper which are floated in the air represent the real carp which swims and leaps up the water-falls.

From the thirteenth to sixteenth of July all visit the graves of ancestors; the fifteenth and sixteenth are holidays, when people send presents to each other, as in December. Farmers are very busy all the time, but they are joyful on the holiday of July and in the New Year. They have only these times to rest if they are not Christians. The fifteenth of November is a holiday for boys of three and five, for girls of five and seven years of age. The parents make very fine dresses for the children to wear on this day. All acquaintances send presents for children of this age, and parents, who receive them, make red rice, called *sekihan*, and send as a return of presents.

JAPANESE POLITENESS.

BY DR. ABEL STEVENS.

I AM still here in the very heart of Japan, delighted with this charming country. "the most beautiful that I have seen

in all the world," as Mrs. Grant said to its empress when she and her lamented husband were presented at court. Some of its mountainous parts are grand, almost as much so as Switzerland; but generally it has a simple rural beauty, picturesque enough to enchant the eyes of artists. It is everywhere cultivated and dotted with little towns and hamlets, which are relieved by abundant foliage and flower gardens, the latter interestingly curious, to say the least, by all sorts of fantastic contrivances, strangely shaped trees and shrubbery, rockeries, fish ponds and lakelets, Liliputian bridges and cascades, shaded seats and arbours. Its domestic architecture is light and cheery; the interiors are fastidiously clean, for you must change your shoes for sandals before you step upon the nicely matted floors. The walls (if such they can be called) slides, mostly of whitest paper in small sashes, and usually open, throwing the whole house into one room. In even their homes the people may be said to live in the open air. And, then, what shall I say of the people themselves—more interesting to me than anything else here? They are the most gentle, cheerful, docile, and polite creatures I have anywhere found in my travels of more than half a century.

All writers about this strange, this thoroughly "original country," agree in pronouncing them the politest of nations. They are called "the French of the Orient." It would be more correct to say

that the French are the Japanese of the Occident. French *politesse* is, however, more mannerism than manners. It is otherwise with Japanese politeness, though not with Japanese etiquette. Their high-class etiquette is antique, and may be said to be even scientific; it is taught, as an essential part of education, in elaborate books and from academic chairs. This is giving way, in the court and everywhere, to Western manners; but its less factitious effects on the popular manners remain. No salutation, in courts or streets, is more gracious or polite than the bow of the Japanese. The Frenchman will doff his hat to you, the Englishman tip his, the hasty Yankee nod his; but the poorest labourer or peasant, the very "coolie" himself, here will bow down at a right-angle or more so to you, repeating the act again and again with the most charming, smiling complacency, as if he could not enough express his good-will. It is curious to see two nearly naked street labourers casually meeting go through this mutual demonstration of cordiality, with their sympathetic "Ohio"—their word for "Good-morning." You see it everywhere; even the little children on the highways practice it. There is genuine heartiness in it. It seems a very rivalry of politeness and good wishes.

READ the Sunday-school lesson at least once a day.