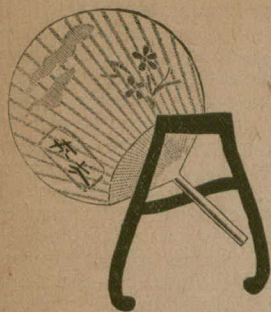


JAPANESE SKETCHES—No. 5.

A TOKIO MATSURI, OR STREET BAZAAR.



SHORT time ago we attended a grand *matsuri*, or Japanese festival, which had been going on for three days in Akasaka, a district of Tokio, and had been attracting crowds of buyers and sellers, of merchants and fun-lovers, as these jolly, characteristic gatherings are sure to do.

The Japanese *matsuri*, half-market, half-show, is a purely national institution, bearing, however, a faint resemblance, with its booths, jugglers and mountebanks, to a country fair in the United States. On a certain day of every month or of three successive years, or on the anniversary of the death of a popular emperor, or in a peculiar sequence of sevens—all quite clear to the Japanese mind, but hopelessly unintelligible to the ordinary foreigner—each district in Tokio and, in fact, every city and country hamlet throughout the empire has one of these great bazaars. They last one or three days, during which period all the shop-keepers in the vicinity reap a rich harvest, and strolling showmen, wrestlers and venders of sweets gather together with their finest performances and choicest wares.

In the olden times these festivals, held, as they were, in the porches of the temples or in the immediate neighborhood of the sacred edifices, to commemorate some saint or hero in the Buddhist calendar, were closely connected with the religion of the people, but nowadays, although held in the same places and on the same days as of yore, they have lost, as might be expected in this materialistic age, much of their sacred significance, being attended far more for the sake of gain and amusement than for the observance of religious rites. Of course, a few devout souls still make their pious pilgrimages to the ancient shrines, but the great mass of the people are absorbed in bargaining and in the merry-making which prevails on all sides.

About eight o'clock on the last night of the Akasaka *matsuri* we started from our house in Nagata Cho and made our way toward the fair, with no light to guide us but that supplied by a dim and watery moon. A few minutes walk brought us to an old *yashiki*, or palace, which in anti-revolutionary times was the home of a Japanese nobleman, but is now a school for the higher education of women, carried on under the management of half a dozen English ladies. We soon passed through a gap in the old wall, which now, with its outlying moat, serves only as a dividing line between two sections of the city. Here on the top of a wooded knoll we saw the modern palace of Prince Kitashirakawa, the uncle of the Mikado, looking wonderfully picturesque and stately in the pale moonlight. A little farther on is a shady lane through which we never pass, especially at night, without a shudder, for there, about twelve years ago, the great Count Okobo was set upon by fanatical assassins, dragged from his carriage and, with his servants and unoffending horses, cruelly put to death. In the park, hard by the prince's palace, stands a granite shaft in memory of the brave man and great political leader, who because he pursued a policy in advance of his age and of his people's intelligence, provoked a spirit of mistrust that resulted in his death. But this is a digression. With the myriad lights of the *matsuri* twinkling in the distance, we must not pause to discuss even such interesting matters as far-seeing policy or fanatical blindness.

A long row of red and white paper lanterns hanging before the houses; fluttering strips of paper and waving branches of bamboo; torches flaring and sputtering, now lighting up for a moment the shops and stalls and again leaving them in almost total darkness; a crowd of men, women and children clad in their quaint, flowing, open-throated gowns, most of them bareheaded, some shod with high wooden clogs or straw sandals and many without any foot-covering; everybody laughing, chattering and pushing their way from booth to booth and from shop to shop—such were the most notable features of the *matsuri* as we approached. In a moment we were in the midst of the throng, elbowing our way like the rest, curious, eager and delighted, in true Japanese fashion. Here, a man is blowing balls of sweets, like soap-bubbles, from a long pipe for the amusement of the children, finishing each with a dextrous twist and passing it to a youthful purchaser. There, a group of women with babies on their backs are gossiping over a pile of *crêpe* neck-handkerchiefs and cotton dress patterns. Yonder is a man explaining a hideous mannikin to an awe-struck crowd, shrieking out the function of each organ in a tone calculated to impress, if not hopelessly to deafen, everyone within sound of his mighty voice.

Seated on the ground, with their stock in trade spread out before them on old blankets, are dozens of dealers in second-hand wares;

and these men make by far the most interesting display, for it is doubtful if one can behold anywhere else on the globe such incongruous collections of valuables and rubbish, of odds and ends suitable for all occasions and for every grade of purchaser. A well worn sword, perchance, reposes beside a pair of huge shell-rimmed spectacles, warranted to aid all eyes; while an empty soda-water bottle or an odd shoe is in close communion with a much dilapidated top-hat or a gaudy ring. That fine old lacquer tray, doubtless obtained for a trifle at the general breaking up of some old family, would possess a value in America of which its owner has never dreamed; yet it is surrounded by a confused mass of the cheapest wares, among which we notice a shabby incense-burner from a Buddhist altar and, more ridiculous still, a cracked tea-cup of common English pottery. There are books in abundance, evidently picked up at auctions without regard to subject or style, the assortment ranging from the "Key to Davie's University Algebra" to the "Easiest Primer of the Japanese Alphabet." Pictures are also seen, illustrating subjects both grave and gay, religious and secular. Every country is represented in this artistic collection, although we are especially struck by the great number of German faces displayed and wonder how Emperor William and Prince Bismarck came to fall into Japanese hands.

A little farther on a beggar woman plays on a *samisen*, producing a discord hideous to Western ears. But look, her poor ditty has been rewarded by a goodly store of *rin*, the smallest Japanese coin, bestowed by her more appreciative countrymen. That stall on the right is filled with tiny cages of gauze—too small, you say, for any bird that sings. True; but they make spacious abodes for the tiny sparks of light, the fire-flies, that are confined within them. Do you care for flowers? Here are nasturtiums, chrysanthemums and pansies; and a few coppers will buy that stately rose-bush, nodding under its wealth of blossoms, or that bunch of exquisite ferns clinging to a piece of old damp wood. Yes, a few coppers, if you can secure the services of a Japanese friend to make the purchase for you; but let that half-blind old flower-woman catch a glimpse of your foreign face, and *ichi yen* (one dollar) will not be deemed too high a price for either the rose-bush or the ferns. This end of the narrow street leading up to the temple is devoted to live goldfish, for this is May, the month when the birthday of every small boy in Japan is celebrated; and fish in glass globes are the favorite presents for the little men.

The temple is ablaze with lights, and in the adjoining shrine a Buddhist service is being conducted with much beating of drums and ringing of bells. The priests and acolytes, clad in rich vestments, are chanting the liturgy in a language unintelligible even to themselves; but except for a shower of *rin* and an occasional pilgrim who pauses a moment to offer a prayer to the hideous idol within, the people take no part in the worship, for, as elsewhere remarked, the old religions of Japan are either dying or dead, and comparatively few people make even a pretence of believing in them.

Close to the temple a ring has been formed, and around it a dense crowd is gathered. The air from the smoking torches and from the huddled mass of humanity is very unpleasant, and as the lights flare on the upturned faces of the multitude and we catch a momentary glimpse of what is going on, we turn away in disgust. It is a Japanese wrestling match, a sight always strange to the ordinary western spectator, even when the contest is between men; but to-night the spectacle is a hundred times more unwelcome for those bleared faces and bloated forms, bared to the waist, belong to women, and we blush and grieve for these poor sisters who have been trained in such a school for such a purpose.

At a little distance a man entreats the crowd in high-pitched tones to step inside a curtained enclosure and behold unknown wonders. What he promises to display within the mysterious curtain our limited knowledge of the Japanese tongue and the noise of the crowd prevent us ascertaining, so we hurry on. Outside the wine-shops the throng is noisiest and most ill-mannered, and we are glad to see the friendly form of a policeman, his short sword hanging by his side, following close behind us; for foreigners are always a target for the rude jests of natives when emboldened by copious draughts of *saké* or rice wine, and the police are well aware of the fact.

The crowd is denser than ever when we turn once more into the main street, and we wonder where all these happy, good-humored people have come from, everyone intent on amusement or shrewd bargaining, and apparently careless and contented. It seems almost impossible that such a throng could be gathered together here in Tokio, where the distress caused by the failure of last year's crops is so great that hundreds are even now starving. Such an anomaly