

"HINA MATSURI," OR THE DOLL FESTIVAL.

THE Island that occupies the smallest portion of the eastern hemisphere, the country to which formerly very little attention was paid, is now introduced to the world as the victor over the Chinese Empire. No doubt the slightest matter or thing that is going on in Japan will be sufficient to awaken the interest of other nations, and especially the old customs and manners that are carried down from the far distant ages to the present day. Every people has its own customs different from those of the others, but ours are among the most interesting. Oh, how happy I would be had I a pen that could fully describe these interesting customs, as well as the picturesque scenery of this beautiful country! Indeed it is far beyond my powers of description; but let me tell you just a few things about my own native land.

I am sure most of you have heard of *Hina matsuri*, or the doll festival, and may have wondered what it is. It is more delightful and pleasant, as it comes in the charming season of early spring, in which the flowers begin to smile and the cheerful songsters sing sweetly on the boughs. Really, the third of March is a great yearly holiday for the little girls. When this occasion approaches they are busy decorating the houses with what are called *O Hina Sama*, tiny models of people and things, the whole Japanese court in miniature. Steps are made on the *Tokonoma* or alcove, covered with a nice cloth, the dolls occupying the highest seat; and on the lower steps are placed all kinds of furniture, from the cabinet to the wash-tub. *Ozen* or tables, spread with the best kinds of food, are laid on the lowest. These dolls and things are mostly handed down from their ancestors. Oh, they are just as cunning and pretty as they can be! The little folks who usually do not have anything to do in the kitchen, are allowed to prepare food by themselves in the small oven for dolls, without asking the help of their mother or sisters. The delicate plates and baskets are filled with an endless variety of fruits and sweets. Peach blossoms are put in handsome vases, adding much to the beauty of the decoration, and for this reason it is also called *Momo no Sekku*, (festival of peach blossoms).

On this day girls invite each other and they eat and play, sitting in front of the dolls. They also partake of a sweet drink called *Shiro-zake*. Oh, just imagine, the lasses dressed up in their best and gayest *kimono* or garments, walking along the streets to their friends' houses, wearing the shiny *geta* (clogs)! They are so sweet and lovely! Indeed this is the happiest day during the year for the little girls, who wait for and think of it so earnestly that they can hardly get to sleep in the nights preceding. I can easily recall to my mind with how much joy and delight I looked forward to this holiday.

Of the origin of this festival I am not quite certain; but it is probable that paper-dolls, which were the chief play-things of the girls of the nobility in ancient times, had been changed to those which are now in use, and that there was not a special day fixed for the purpose of playing with them. It is said that this festival is celebrated in order to give some idea to the little girls that they are to keep the houses when they grow older.

The boys' festival takes place on the fifth of May. It is very much like that of the girls, but the dolls are the figures of brave warriors, who lived many centuries ago, and there is not a single doll that represents a girl. Such warlike toys as swords, spears, bows and arrows are used in decorating, and also various kinds of beautiful flags, made with brocade or white crape, with the family crest embroidered or dyed. Out of doors the gigantic paper carps are caused to float in the air from poles, after the manner of flags. They are very beautiful, differing in colors. It is customary to send these carps as a present in the first May after the birth of a male child. With the exception of the New Year, this is of all Japanese festivals, the one whose outward signs are most conspicuous. The idea is, that as the carp swims up the river against the current, so will the boy, overcoming all obstacles, make his way in the world and rise to fame and fortune.

I could tell many more things about these festivals and other customs, but now will say adieu to you all as I do not wish to make you tired of reading.

Japan.

AI INAGAKI.

MISSION BAND WORK.

HOW TO BUILD UP THE MISSION BAND.

MISSION Bands are usually built up on the "Little by Little" system, and personal effort on the part of each member. True, it needs a good manager at the head of affairs, but if each member will do all he can, and if all work for the same cause, namely, the upbuilding of Christ's Kingdom, then that Mission Band, if consecrated to the Lord, can accomplish much. Let each one go to work in earnest, as though he meant to accomplish something. WORK AS IF FOR WAGES! Here is a problem for each of us to solve: If we were paid in money for our missionary work, how much a year do we earn?

But after all our efforts, PRAYER IS THE GREAT KEY-NOTE OF SUCCESS IN THIS WORK! Let each member pray for the Mission Band, pray in faith, believing that the promise is sure. "What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them," Mk. 11.24. "If ye shall ask anything in my name I will do it," John 14.14. There is no better way of building up a Mission Band than fervent prayer, unwavering faith, and then following out the Lord's command, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might, for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave whither thou goest," Ecc. 9.10. Mission work is the Lord's own work, and He will certainly bless it in answer to prayer. If your Mission Band is failing, or likely to fail altogether, tell the Lord about it; if there is sad lack of interest in missionary work (and there are few things more discouraging), tell the Lord the exact trouble, ask Him to make you more interested, so that you may interest others. Even one really enthusiastic member can do an immense amount of good in a Band. Try to get each one to do something. All at work and all working together is another secret of success.

A. B. C.

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(To be continued.)