

PLEASANT HOURS

A PAPER FOR OUR YOUNG FOLK

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HOW THE CHILDREN PLAY IN JAPAN.

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The most interesting sights are the games and sports of the children. The

Japanese believe in enjoying themselves, and the young folks are as bright and merry as the children of other climes. The girls play battledore and shuttlecock, and the boys fly kites and spin tops. The girls enjoy their game very much, and are usually dressed in their prettiest robes and bright-coloured girdles, their faces are powdered with a little rice flour, their lips are tinted crimson, and their hair is done up in a most extraordinary fashion.

They play in the street, sometimes forming a circle of half a dozen or more, and sending the flying shuttlecock from one to the other. They are very skillful, and rarely miss a stroke. The boys like a strong wind, that their kites may soar high; but the girls sing a song that it may be calm, so that their shuttlecocks may go right.

The boys have wonderful kites, made of tough paper pasted on light bamboo frames, and decorated with dragons, warriors, and storm hobgoblins. Across the top of the kites is stretched a thin ribbon of whalebone, which vibrates in the wind, making a peculiar humming sound. When I first walked the streets of Tokio, I could not imagine what the strange noises meant that seemed to proceed from the sky above me; the sound at times was shrill and sharp, and then low and musical. At last I discovered several kites in the air, and when the breeze freshened, the sounds were greatly increased.

Sometimes the boys put glue on their kite-strings, near the top, and dip the strings into pounded glass. Then they fight with their kites, which they place in proper positions, and attempt to saw each other's strings with the pounded glass. When a string is severed, a kite falls, and is claimed by the victor. The boys also have play-fights with their tops.

Sometimes I met boys running a

race on long stilts; at other times they would have wrestling matches, in which little six-year-old youngsters would toss and tumble one another to the ground. Their bodies were stout and

the boys have their "Feast of Flags," and is hollow. When there is a breeze it fills with wind, and its tail and fins flap in the air, as though it were trying to swim away. The fish is intended to show that there are boys in the family. It is the carp, which is found in Japanese waters, and swims against the stream and leaps over waterfalls. The boys must therefore learn from the fish to persevere against difficulties, and surmount every obstacle in life. When hundreds of these huge fishes are seen swimming in the breeze, it presents a very curious appearance.

The girls have their "Feast of Dolls" on the third day of the third month. During the week preceding this holiday, the shops of Tokio are filled with dolls and richly dressed figures. This "Feast of Dolls" is a great gala-day for the girls. They bring out all their dolls and gorgeously dressed images, which are quite numerous in respectable families, having been kept from one generation to another. The images range from a few inches to a foot in height, and represent court nobles and ladies, with the Mikako and his household, in full costume. They are all arranged on shelves, with many other beautiful toys, and the girls present offerings of rice, fruit, and "saki" wine, and mimic all the routine of court life. The shops display large numbers of these images at this special season; after the holidays they suddenly disappear.

I once bought a large doll-baby at one of the shops, to send home to my little sister, the doll was dressed in the ordinary way, having its head shaved in the style of most Japanese babies. It was so lifelike, that when propped up on a chair a person would easily suppose it to be a live baby.

In going along the Tori, I would often see a group of children gathered around a street story-teller, listening with widening eyes and

breathless attention to the ghost story or startling romance which he was narrating. Many old folks also gathered around, and, the story teller shouted and stamped on his elevated



JAPANESE LADY AND CHILD.

chubby, and their rosy cheeks showed signs of health and happiness. They were always good-natured, and never allowed themselves to get angry. On the fifth day of the fifth month

daimio processions, and tournaments. Outside the house a bamboo pole is erected by the gate, from the top of which a large paper fish is suspended. This fish is sometimes six feet long,

and is hollow. When there is a breeze it fills with wind, and its tail and fins flap in the air, as though it were trying to swim away. The fish is intended to show that there are boys in the family. It is the carp, which is found in Japanese waters, and swims against the stream and leaps over waterfalls. The boys must therefore learn from the fish to persevere against difficulties, and surmount every obstacle in life. When hundreds of these huge fishes are seen swimming in the breeze, it presents a very curious appearance.