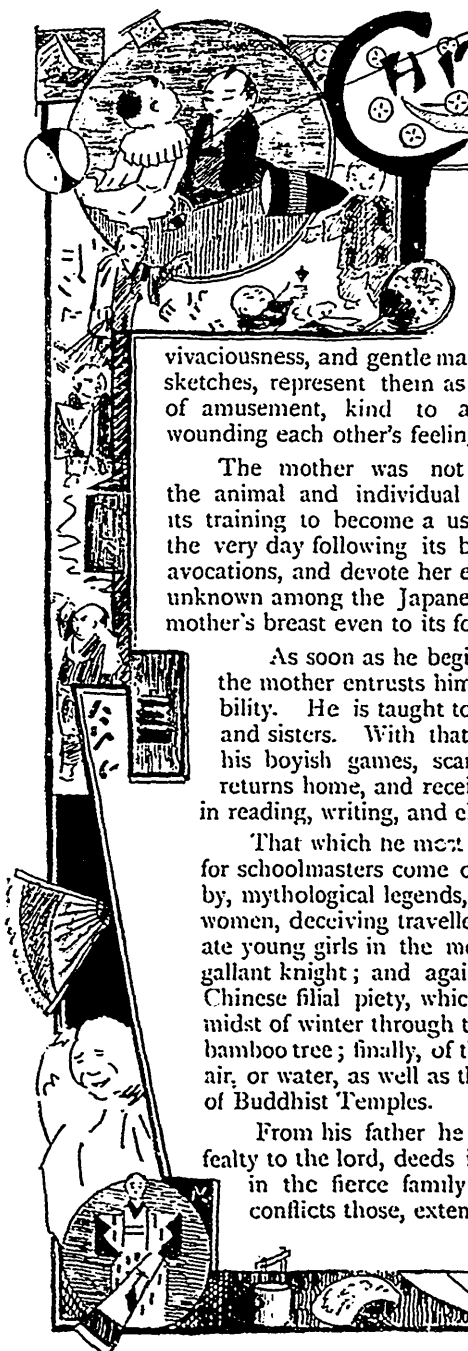




CHRISTMAS GIFTS IN JAPAN

JAPANESE children--until the time of the arrival of the Europeans, which disturbed everything in the arts, politics, the family, etc.—received a liberal, sound, practical education. All travellers have remarked their politeness, vivaciousness, and gentle manners. Their national artists, in expressive sketches, represent them as mirthful, finding in everything a source of amusement, kind to animals, seldom overbearing and never wounding each other's feelings.

The mother was not satisfied with imparting to her child the animal and individual life; she desired it to be prepared by its training to become a useful member of the community. On the very day following its birth, then other can resume her wonted avocations, and devote her energies to her little one. Weaning being unknown among the Japanese, the child continues to feed from the mother's breast even to its fourth year.

As soon as he begins to walk, to grow a little more robust, the mother entrusts him with a share of the household responsibility. He is taught to carry on his back his younger brothers and sisters. With that burden on his shoulders, he proceeds to his boyish games, scampers wheresoever his friends call him, returns home, and receives from his mother his daily instruction in reading, writing, and elementary arithmetic.

That which he most willingly listens to, even learns by heart—for schoolmasters come only afterwards—are stories of times gone by, mythological legends, tales that tell him of foxes, disguised as women, deceiving travellers; of the fierce demon Shiuter-Dogi, who ate young girls in the mountain, and whose head was cut off by a gallant knight; and again, of the twenty-four famous examples of Chinese filial piety, which relate how dutiful sons will go in the midst of winter through the snow, to fetch succulent shoots of the bamboo tree; finally, of the names of the animals that inhabit earth, air, or water, as well as the names of deities no less numerous, and of Buddhist Temples.

From his father he learns quaint episodes of valor, cunning, fealty to the lord, deeds immortalizing the heroes that took a part in the fierce family conflicts of Taira or Minamoto: bloody conflicts those, extending from the 13th to the 17th century