



Child-Life in Japan and Japanese Child Stories

Matilda Chaplin Ayrton

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PREFACE.

Over a quarter of a century ago, while engaged in introducing the American public school system into Japan, I became acquainted in Tokio with Mrs. Matilda Chaplin Ayrton, the author of "Child-Life in Japan." This highly accomplished lady was a graduate of Edinburgh University, and had obtained the degrees of Bachelor of Letters and Bachelor of Sciences, besides studying medicine in Paris. She had married Professor William Edward Ayrton, the electric engineer and inventor, then connected with the Imperial College of Engineering of Japan, and since president of the Institute of Electric Engineers in London. She took a keen interest in the Japanese people and never wearied of studying them and their beautiful country. With my sister, she made excursions to some of the many famous places in the wonderful city of Tokio. When her own little daughter, born among the camellias and chrysanthemums, grew up under her Japanese nurse, Mrs. Ayrton became more and more interested in the home life of the Japanese and in the pictures and stories which delighted the children of the Mikado's Empire. After her return to England, in 1879, she wrote this book.

In the original work, the money and distances, the comparisons and illustrations, were naturally English, and not American. For this reason, I have ventured to alter the text slightly here and there, that the American child reader may more clearly catch the drift of the thought, have given to each Japanese word the standard spelling now preferred by scholars and omitted statements of fact which were once, but are no longer, true. I have also translated or omitted hard Japanese words, shortened long sentences, rearranged the illustrations, and added notes which will make the subject clearer. Although railways, telegraphs, and steamships, clothes and architecture, schools and customs, patterned more or less closely after those in fashion in America and Europe, have altered many things in Japan and caused others to disappear, yet the children's world of toys and games and stories does not change very fast. In the main, it may be said, we have here a true picture of the old Japan which we all delighted in seeing, when, in those sunny days, we

lived in sight of Yedo Bay and Fuji Yama, with Japanese boys and girls all around us.

The best portions and all the pictures of Mrs. Ayrton's big and costly book have been retained and reproduced, including her own preface or introduction, and the book is again set forth with a hearty "ohio" (good morning) of salutation and sincere "omédéto" (congratulations) that the nations of the world are rapidly becoming one family. May every reader of "Child-Life in Japan" see, sometime during the twentieth century, the country and the people of whom Mrs. Ayrton has written with such lively spirit and such warm appreciation.

WM. ELLIOT GRIFFIS.

ITHACA, N.Y.

INTRODUCTION

In almost every home are Japanese fans, in our shops Japanese dolls and balls and other knick-knacks, on our writing-tables bronze crabs or lacquered pen-tray with outlined on it the extinct volcano [Fuji San]^[1] that is the most striking mountain seen from the capital of Japan. At many places of amusement Japanese houses of real size have been exhibited, and the jargon of fashion for "Japanese Art" even reaches our children's ears.

Yet all these things seem dull and lifeless when thus severed from the quaint cheeriness of their true home. To those familiar with Japan, that bamboo fan-handle recalls its graceful grassy tree, the thousand and one daily purposes for which bamboo wood serves. We see the open shop where squat the brown-faced artisans cleverly dividing into those slender divisions the fan-handle, the wood-block engraver's where some dozen men sit patiently chipping at their cherry-wood blocks, and the printer's where the coloring arrangements seem so simple to those used to western machinery, but where the colors are so rich and true. We see the picture stuck on the fan frame with starch paste, and drying in the brilliant summer sunlight. The designs recall vividly the life around, whether that life be the stage, the home, insects, birds, or flowers. We think of halts at wayside inns, when bowing tea-house girls at once proffer these fans to hot and tired guests.

The tonsured oblique-eyed doll suggests the festival of similarly oblique-eyed little girls on the 3rd of March. Then dolls of every degree obtain for a day "Dolls' Rights." In every Japanese household all the dolls of the present and previous generations are, on that festival, set out to best advantage. Beside them are sweets, green-speckled rice cake, and daintily gilt and lacquered dolls' utensils. For some time previous, to meet the increased demand, the doll shopman has been very busy. He sits before a straw-holder into which he can readily stick, to dry, the wooden supports of the plaster dolls' heads he is painting, as he takes first one and then another to give artistic touches to their glowing