

MATILDA AYRTON

CHILD-LIFE IN JAPAN
AND JAPANESE CHILD
STORIES

Matilda Ayrton

**Child-Life in Japan and
Japanese Child Stories**

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Ayrton M.

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Mrs. M. Chaplin Ayrton

Child-Life in Japan and Japanese Child Stories

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 cheeks or little tongue. That dolly that seems but "so odd" to Polly or Maggie is there the cherished darling of its little owner. It passes half its day tied on to her back, peeping companionably its head over her shoulder. At night it is lovingly sheltered under the green mosquito curtains, and provided with a toy wooden pillow.

The expression "Japanese Art" seems but a created word expressing either the imitations of it, or the artificial transplanting of Japanese things to our houses. The whole glory of art in Japan is, that it is not Art, but Nature simply rendered, by a people with a fancy and love of fun quite Irish in character. Just as Greek sculptures were good, because in those days artists modelled the corsetless life around them, so the Japanese artist does not draw well his lightly draped figures, cranes, and insects because these things strike him as beautiful, but because he is familiar with their every action.

The Japanese house out of Japan seems but a dull and listless affair. We miss the idle, easy-going life and chatter, the tea, the sweetmeats, the pipes and charcoal brazier, the clogs awaiting their wearers on the large flat stone at the entry, the grotesquely trained ferns, the glass balls and ornaments tinkling in the breeze, that hang, as well as lanterns, from the eaves, the garden with tiny pond and goldfish, bridge and miniature hill, the bright sunshine beyond the sharp shadow of the upward curving angles of the tiled roof, the gay, scarlet folds of the women's under-dress peeping out, their little litter of embroidery or mending, and the babies, brown and half naked, scrambling about so happily. For, what has a baby to be miserable about in a land where it is scarcely ever slapped, where its clothing, always loose, is yet warm in winter, where it basks freely in air and sunshine? It

¹ *Fuji San*, or Fuji no Yama, the highest mountain in the Japanese archipelago, is in the province of Suruga, sixty miles west of Tokio. Its crest is covered with snow most of the year. Twenty thousand pilgrims visit it annually. Its name may mean Not Two (such), or Peerless.

lives in a house, that from its thick grass mats, its absence of furniture, and therefore of commands "not to touch," is the very beau-ideal of an infant's playground.

The object with which the following pages were written, was that young folks who see and handle so often Japanese objects, but who find books of travels thither too long and dull for their reading, might catch a glimpse of the spirit that pervades life in the "Land of the Rising Sun." A portion of the book is derived from translations from Japanese tales, kindly given to the author by Mr. Basil H. Chamberlain, whilst the rest was written at idle moments during graver studies.

The games and sports of Japanese children have been so well described by Professor Griffis, that we give, as an Appendix, his account of their doings.

SEVEN SCENES OF CHILD-LIFE IN JAPAN

A Ride on a Bamboo Rail

These little boys all live a long way off in islands called "Japan." They have all rather brown chubby faces, and they are very merry. Unless they give themselves a really hard knock they seldom get cross or cry.

In the second large picture two of the little boys are playing at snowball. Although it may be hotter in the summer in their country than it is here, the winter is as cold as you feel it. Like our own boys, these lads enjoy a fall of snow, and still better than snowballing they like making a snowman with a charcoal ball for each eye and a streak of charcoal for his mouth. The shoes which they usually wear out of doors are better for a snowy day than your boots, for their feet do not sink into the snow, unless it is deep. These shoes are of wood, and make a boy seem to be about three inches taller than he really is. The shoe, you see, has no laces or buttons, but is kept on the foot by that thong which passes between the first and second toe. The thong is made of grass, and covered with strong paper, or with white or colored calico. The boy in the check dress wears his shoes without socks, but you see the other boy has socks on. His socks are made of dark blue calico, with a thickly woven sole, and a place, like one finger of a glove, for his big toe. If you were to wear Japanese shoes, you would think the thong between your toes very uncomfortable. Yet from their habit of wearing this sort of shoe, the big toe grows more separate from the other toes, and the skin between this and the next toe becomes as hard as the skin of a dog's or a cat's paw.

The boys are not cold, for their cotton clothes, being wadded, are warm and snug. One boy has a rounded pouch fastened to his sash. It is red and prettily embroidered with flowers or birds, and is his purse, in which he keeps some little toys and some money. The other boy very likely has not a pouch, but he has two famous big pockets. Like all Japanese, he uses the part of his large sleeve which hangs down as his pocket. Thus when a group of little children are disturbed at play you see each little hand seize a treasured toy and disappear into its sleeve, like mice running into their holes with bits of cheese.

In the next large picture are two boys who are fond of music. One has a flute, which is made of bamboo wood. These flutes are easy to make, as bamboo wood grows hollow, with cross divisions at intervals. If you cut a piece with a division forming one end you need only make the outside holes in order to finish your flute.

The child sitting down has a drum. His drum and the paper lanterns hanging up have painted on them an ornament which is also the crest of the house of "Arima."² If these boys belong to this family they wear the same crest embroidered on the centre of the backs of their coats.

Korean Lion is the title of the picture which forms the frontispiece; it represents a game that children in Japan are very fond of playing. They are probably trying to act as well as the maskers did whom they saw on New Year's Day, just as our children try and imitate things they see in a pantomime. The masker goes from house to house accompanied by one or two men who play on cymbals, flute, and drum. He steps into a shop where the people of the house and their friends sit drinking tea, and passers-by pause in front of the open shop to see the fun. He takes a mask, like the one in the picture, off his back and puts it over his head. This boar's-head mask is painted scarlet and black, and gilt. It has a green cloth hanging down behind, in order that you may not perceive where the mask ends and the man's body begins. Then the masker imitates an animal. He goes up to a young

² *Arima* was one of the daimios or landed nobleman, nearly three hundred in number, out of whom has been formed the new nobility of Japan, a certain number of which are in the Upper House of the Imperial Diet.

lady and lays down his ugly head beside her to be patted, as "Beast" may have coaxed "Beauty" in the fairy tale. He grunts, and rolls, and scratches himself. The children almost forget he is a man, and roar with laughter at the funny animal. When they begin to tire of this fun he exchanges this mask for some of the two or three others he carries with him. He puts on a mask of an old woman over his face, and at the back of his head a very different second mask, a cloth tied over the centre of the head, making the two faces yet more distinct from each other. He has quickly arranged the back of his dress to look like the front of a person, and he acts, first presenting the one person to his spectators, then the other. He makes you even imagine he has four arms, so cleverly can he twist round his arm and gracefully fan what is in reality the back of his head.

The tops the lads are playing with in this picture are not quite the same shape as our tops, but they spin very well. Some men are so clever at making spinning-tops run along strings, throwing them up into the air and catching them with a tobacco-pipe, that they earn a living by exhibiting their skill.

Some of the tops are formed of short pieces of bamboo with a wooden peg put through them, and the hole cut in the side makes them have a fine hum as the air rushes in whilst they spin.

The boys in the next large picture must be playing with the puppies of a large dog, to judge from their big paws. There are a great many large dogs in the streets of Tokio; some are very tame, and will let children comb their hair and ornament them and pull them about. These dogs do not wear collars, as do our pet dogs, but a wooden label bearing the owner's name is hung round their necks. Other big dogs are almost wild.³

Half-a-dozen of these dogs will lie in one place, stretched drowsily on the grassy city walls under the trees, during the daytime. Towards evening they rouse themselves and run off to yards and rubbish-heaps to pick up what they can. They will eat fish, but two or three dogs soon get to know where the meat-eating Englishmen live. They come trotting in regularly with a business-like air to search among the day's refuse for bones. Should any interloping dog try to establish a right to share the feast he can only gain his footing after a victorious battle. All these dogs are very wolfish-looking, with straight hair, which is usually white or tan-colored. There are other pet dogs kept in houses. These look something like spaniels. They are small, with their black noses so much turned up that it seems as if, when they were puppies, they had tumbled down and broken the bridge of their nose. They are often ornamented like dog Toby in "Punch and Judy," with a ruff made of some scarlet stuff round their necks.

After the heavy autumn rains have filled the roads with big puddles, it is great fun, this boy thinks, to walk about on stilts. You see him on page 11. His stilts are of bamboo wood, and he calls them "Heron-legs," after the long-legged snowy herons that strut about in the wet rice-fields. When he struts about on them, he wedges the upright between his big and second toe as if the stilt was like his shoes. He has a good view of his two friends who are wrestling, and probably making hideous noises like wild animals as they try to throw one another. They have seen fat public wrestlers stand on opposite sides of a sanded ring, stoop, rubbing their thighs, and in a crouching attitude and growling, slowly advance upon one another. Then when near to one another, the spring is made and the men close. If after some time the round is not decided by a throw, the umpire, who struts about like a turkey-cock, fanning himself, approaches. He plucks the girdle of the weaker combatant, when the wrestlers at once retire to the sides of the arena to rest, and to sprinkle a little water over themselves.

In the neighborhood in which the children shown in the picture live, there is a temple. In honor of the god a feast-day is held on the tenth of every month. The tenth day of the tenth month is a yet greater feast-day. On these days they go the first thing in the morning to the barber's, have their heads shaved and dressed, and their faces powdered with white, and their lips and cheeks painted pink. They wear their best clothes and smartest sashes. Then they clatter off on their wooden clogs

³ *Wild-dogs*: ownerless dogs have now been exterminated, and every dog in Japan is owned, licensed, taxed, or else liable to go the way of the old wolfish-looking curs. The pet spaniel-like dogs are called *chin*.

to the temple and buy two little rice-cakes at the gates. Next they come to two large, comical bronze dogs sitting on stands, one on each side of the path. They reach up and gently rub the dog's nose, then rub their own noses, rub the dog's eyes, and then their own, and so on, until they have touched the dog's and their own body all over. This is their way of praying for good health. They also add another to the number of little rags that have been hung by each visitor about the dog's neck. Then they go to the altar and give their cakes to a boy belonging to the temple. In exchange he presents them with one rice-cake which has been blessed. They ring a round brass bell to call their god's attention, and throw him some money into a grated box as big as a child's crib. Then they squat down and pray to be good little boys. Now they go out and amuse themselves by looking at all the stalls of toys and cakes, and flowers and fish.

The man who sells the gold-fish, with fan-like tails as long as their bodies, has also turtles. These boys at last settle that of all the pretty things they have seen they would best like to spend their money on a young turtle. For their pet rabbits and mice died, but turtles, they say, are painted on fans and screens and boxes because turtles live for ten thousand years. Even the noble white crane is said to live no more than a thousand years. In this picture they have carried home the turtle and are much amused at the funny way it walks and peeps its head in and out from under its shell.

FIRST MONTH

Little Good Boy had just finished eating the last of five rice cakes called "dango," that had been strung on a skewer of bamboo and dipped in soy sauce, when he said to his little sister, called Chrysanthemum: —

"O-Kiku, it is soon the great festival of the New Year."

"What shall we do then?" asked little O-Kiku, not clearly remembering the festival of the previous year.

Thus questioned, Yoshi-san⁴ had his desired opening to hold forth on the coming delights, and he replied: —

"Men will come the evening before the great feast-day and help Plum-blossom, our maid, to clean all the house with brush and broom. Others will set up the decoration in front of our honored gateway. They will dig two small holes and plant a gnarled, black-barked father-pine branch on the left, and the slighter reddish mother-pine branch on the right. They will then put with these the tall knotted stem of a bamboo, with its smooth, hard green leaves that chatter when the wind blows. Next they will take a grass rope, about as long as a tall man, fringed with grass, and decorated with zigzag strips of white paper. These, our noble father says, are meant for rude images of men offering themselves in homage to the august gods."

"Oh, yes! I have not forgotten," interrupts Chrysanthemum, "this cord is stretched from bamboo to bamboo; and Plum-blossom says the rope is to bar out the nasty two-toed, red, gray, and black demons, the badgers, the foxes, and other evil spirits from crossing our threshold. But I think it is the next part of the arch which is the prettiest, the whole bunch of things they tie in the middle of the rope. There is the crooked-back lobster, like a bowed old man, with all around the camellia branches, whose young leaves bud before the old leaves fall. There are pretty fern leaves shooting forth in pairs, and deep down between them the little baby fern-leaf. There is the bitter yellow orange, whose name, you know, means 'many parents and children.' The name of the black piece of charcoal is a pun on our homestead."

"But best of all," says Yoshi-san, "I like the seaweed hontawara, for it tells me of our brave Queen Jingu Kogo, who, lest the troops should be discouraged, concealed from the army that her husband the king had died, put on armor, and led the great campaign against Korea."⁵

⁴ *Yoshi-san*. *Yoshi* means good, excellent, and *san* is like our "Mr.," but is applied to any one from big man to baby. The girls are named after flowers, stars, or other pretty or useful objects.

⁵ *The campaign against Korea: 200 A.D.*

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