JAPANESE GIRLS AND WOMEN.

CHAPTER I.

CHILDHOOD.

To the Japanese baby the beginning of life is not very different from its beginning to babies in the Western world. Its birth, whether it be girl or boy, is the cause of much rejoicing. As boys alone can carry on the family name and inherit titles and estates, they are considered of more importance, but many a mother's heart is made glad by the addition of a daughter to the family circle.

As soon as the event takes place, a special messenger is dispatched to notify relatives and intimate friends, while formal letters of announcement are sent to those less closely related. All persons thus notified must make an early visit to the newcomer, in order to welcome it into the

world, and must either take with them or send before them some present. Toys, pieces of cotton, silk, or crêpe for the baby's dress are regarded as suitable; and these must be accompanied by dried fish or eggs, for good luck. Where eggs are sent, they are neatly arranged in a covered box, which may contain thirty, forty, or even one hundred eggs.[1] The baby, especially if it be the first one in a family, receives many presents in the first few weeks of its life, and at a certain time proper acknowledgment must be made and return presents sent. This is usually done when the baby is thirty days old.

Both baby and mother have a hard time of it for the first few weeks of its life. The baby is passed from hand to hand, fussed over, and talked to so much by the visitors that come in, that it must think this world a trying place. The mother, too, is denied the rest and quiet she needs, and wears

[1] All presents in Japan must be wrapped in white paper, although, except for funerals, this paper must have some writing on it, and must be tied with a peculiar red and white paper string, in which is inserted the *noshi*, or bit of dried fish daintily folded in a piece of colored paper, which is an indispensable accompaniment of every present.

herself out in the excitement of seeing her friends, and the physical exercise of going through, so far as possible, the ceremonious bows and salutations that etiquette prescribes.

On the seventh day the baby receives its name.[1] There is no especial ceremony connected with this, except that the child's birth is formally registered, together with its name, at the district office of registration, and the household keep holiday in honor of the event. A certain kind of rice, cooked with red beans, a festival dish denoting good fortune, is usually partaken of by the family on this occasion.

The next important event in the baby's life is the *miya maéri*, a ceremony which

[1] A child is rarely given the name of a living member of the family, or of any friend. The father's name, slightly modified, is frequently given to a son, and those of ancestors long ago dead are sometimes used. One reason for this is probably the inconvenience of similar names in the same family, and middle names, as a way of avoiding this difficulty, are unknown. The father usually names the child, but some friend or patron of the family may be asked to do it. Names of beautiful objects in nature, such as Plum, Snow, Sunshine, Lotos, Gold, are commonly used for girls, while boys of the lower classes often rejoice in such appellations as Stone, Bear, Tiger, etc. To call a child after a person would not be considered any especial compliment.

corresponds roughly with our christening. On the thirtieth day after birth, the baby is taken for its first visit to the temple. For this visit great preparations are made, and the baby is dressed in finest silk or crêpe, gayly figured, — garments made especially for the occasion. Upon the dress appears in various places the crest of the family, as on all ceremonial dresses, whether for young or old, for every Japanese family has its crest. Thus arrayed, and accompanied by members of the family, the young baby is carried to one of the Shinto temples, and there placed under the protection of the patron deity of the temple. This god, chosen from a great number of Shinto deities, is supposed to become the special guardian of the child through life. Offerings are made to the god and to the priest, and a blessing is obtained; and the baby is thus formally placed under the care of a special deity. This ceremony over, there is usually an entertainment of some kind at the home of the parents, especially if the family be one of high rank. Friends are invited, and if there are any who have not as yet sent in presents, they may give them at this time.

It is usually on this day that the family send to their friends some acknowledgment of the presents received. This sometimes consists of the red bean rice, such as is prepared for the seventh day celebration, and sometimes of cakes of *mochi*, or rice paste. A letter of thanks usually accompanies the return present. If rice is sent, it is put in a handsome lacquered box, the box placed on a lacquered tray, and the whole covered with a square of crêpe or silk, richly decorated. The box, the tray, and the cover are of course returned, and, curious to say, the box must be returned unwashed, as it would be very unlucky to send it back clean. A piece of Japanese paper must be slipped into the box after its contents have been removed, and box and tray must be given back, just as they are, to the messenger. Sometimes a box of eggs, or a peculiar kind of dried fish, called *katsuobushi*, is sent with this present, when it is desired to make an especially handsome return. When as many as fifty or one hundred return presents of this kind are to be sent, it is no slight tax on the mistress of the house to see that no one is forgotten, and that all is

properly done. As special messengers are sent, a number of men are sometimes kept busy for two or three days.

After all these festivities, a quiet, undisturbed life begins for the baby, — a life which is neither unpleasant nor unhealthful. It is not jolted, rocked, or trotted to sleep; it is allowed to cry if it chooses, without anybody's supposing that the world will come to an end because of its crying; and its dress is loose and easily put on, so that very little time is spent in the tiresome process of dressing and undressing. Under these conditions the baby thrives and grows strong and fat; learns to take life with some philosophy, even at a very early age; and is not subject to fits of hysterical or passionate crying, brought on by much jolting or trotting, or by the wearisome process of pinning, buttoning, tying of strings, and thrusting of arms into tight sleeves.

The Japanese baby's dress, though not as pretty as that of our babies, is in many ways much more sensible. It consists of as many wide-sleeved, straight, silk, cotton, or flannel garments as the season of the year may require, — all cut after exactly

the same pattern, and that pattern the same in shape as the grown-up *kimono*. These garments are fitted, one inside of the other, before they are put on; then they are laid down on the floor and the baby is laid into them; a soft belt, attached to the outer garment or dress, is tied around the waist, and the baby is dressed without a shriek or a wail, as simply and easily as possible. The baby's dresses, like those of our babies, are made long enough to cover the little bare feet; and the sleeves cover the hands as well, so preventing the unmerciful scratching that most babies give to their faces, as well as keeping the hands warm and dry.

Babies of the lower classes, within a few weeks after birth, are carried about tied upon the back of some member of the family, frequently an older sister or brother, who is sometimes not more than five or six years old. The poorer the family, the earlier is the young baby thus put on some one's back, and one frequently sees babies not more than a month old, with bobbing heads and blinking eyes, tied by long bands of cloth to the backs of older brothers or sisters, and living in the streets in all

weathers. When it is cold, the sister's *haori*, or coat, serves as an extra covering for the baby as well; and when the sun is hot, the sister's parasol keeps off its rays from the bobbing bald head. Living in public, as the Japanese babies do, they soon acquire an intelligent, interested look, and seem to enjoy the games of the elder children, upon whose backs they are carried, as much as the players themselves. Babies of the middle classes do not live in public in this way, but ride about upon the backs of their nurses until they are old enough to toddle by themselves, and they are not so often seen in the streets; as few but the poorest Japanese, even in the large cities, are unable to have a pleasant bit of garden in which the children can play and take the air. The children of the richest families, the nobility, and the imperial family, are never carried about in this way. The young child is borne in the arms of an attendant, within doors and without; but as this requires the care of some one constantly, and prevents the nurse from doing anything but care for the child, only the richest can afford this luxury. With the baby tied to her back, a

woman is able to care for a child, and yet go on with her household labors, and baby watches over mother's or nurse's shoulder, between naps taken at all hours, the processes of drawing water, washing and cooking rice, and all the varied work of the house. Imperial babies are held in the arms of some one night and day, from the moment of birth until they have learned to walk, a custom which seems to render the lot of the high-born infant less comfortable in some ways than that of the plebeian child.

The flexibility of the knees, which is required for comfort in the Japanese method of sitting, is gained in very early youth by the habit of setting a baby down with its knees bent under it, instead of with its legs out straight before it, as seems to us the natural way. To the Japanese, the normal way for a baby to sit is with its knees bent under it, and so, at a very early age, the muscles and tendons of the knees are accustomed to what seems to us a most unnatural and uncomfortable posture.[1]

[1] That the position of the Japanese in sitting is really unnatural and unhygienic, is shown by recent measurements taken by the surgeons of the Japanese army.

Among the lower classes, where there are few bathing facilities in the houses, babies of a few weeks old are often taken to the public bath house and put into the hot bath. These Japanese baths are usually heated to a temperature of a hundred to a hundred and thirteen Fahrenheit, — a temperature that most foreigners visiting Japan find almost unbearable. To a baby's delicate skin, the first bath or two is usually a severe trial, but it soon becomes accustomed to the high temperature, and takes its bath, as it does everything else, placidly and in public. Born into a country where cow's milk is never used, the Japanese baby is wholly dependent upon

These measurements prove that the small stature of the Japanese is due largely to the shortness of the lower limbs, which are out of proportion to the rest of the body. The sitting from early childhood upon the legs bent at the knee, arrests the development of that part of the body, and produces an actual deformity in the whole nation. This deformity is less noticeable among the peasants, who stand and walk so much as to secure proper development of the legs; but among merchants, literary men, and others of sedentary habits, it is most plainly to be seen. The introduction of chairs and tables, as a necessary adjunct of Japanese home life, would doubtless in time alter the physique of the Japanese as a people.