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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK OUR LITTLE JAPANESE COUSIN ***



Our Little Japanese Cousin

The Little Cousin Series



Our Little Japanese Cousin
By MARY HAZELTON WADE

Our Little Indian Cousin
By MARY HAZELTON WADE

Our Little Brown Cousin
By MARY HAZELTON WADE

Our Little Russian Cousin
By MARY HAZELTON WADE



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LOTUS BLOSSOM.



Our Little Japanese

Cousin

By
Mary Hazelton Wade

Illustrated by
L. J. Bridgman



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MDCCCCI

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Our Little Japanese Cousin

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LOTUS BLOSSOM is the dearest little girl in the world. I beg your pardon—I mean in the Eastern world, for she lives far away across the Pacific, on one of the beautiful islands of Japan.

Lotus Blossom is very pretty. She has a round face, with a clear, yellow skin, and her teeth are like little pearls. Her black hair is cut square across the forehead and braided behind. It is never done up in curl-papers or twisted over a hot iron; the little girl's mamma would think that very untidy.

Lotus Blossom does not smile very often, yet she is always happy. She does not remember crying once in her life. Why should she cry? Papa and mamma are always kind and ready to play with her. She is never sent to bed alone in the dark, for she goes to sleep, and gets up in the morning when her parents do. She does not play so hard as to get tired out and cross with everybody. She takes everything quietly, just as the big folks do, and is never in a hurry. Her

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playmates do not say unkind words to make her sad, for the children of Japan are taught to be polite above everything else. Why, I have heard that once upon a time one little yellow boy so far forgot himself as to call a lady bad names. His parents were terribly shocked. They felt that they had been disgraced, and at once sent for a policeman to go to the lady's house and ask for their child's pardon. As for him! well, he was severely punished in a way you will hear about later on in my story.



TOYO FEEDING THE PIGEONS.

Besides all these things which help to make Lotus Blossom happy, she is dressed comfortably. Tight, stiff shoes could never be thought of for a minute. She wears white stockings made of cloth, with a separate place in each one for the big toe. In fact, they resemble long mittens. That is all Lotus Blossom wears on her feet in the house; but when she goes out-doors she has pretty sandals, if the walking is good. These sandals have straps, which are fastened on the foot between the big toe and around the ankle. If the ground is muddy or covered with snow, Lotus Blossom puts on her clogs. They are queer things, raised high on strips of wood. Of course one can't walk very fast on such clumsy affairs, but the Japanese dislike getting their feet wet as much as kittens do, and would wear anything to prevent such a mishap. But if Lotus Blossom stops at a house or store while she is out walking, she is polite enough to take off her clogs or sandals before going inside. That is one reason why every building can be kept so clean.

The little Japanese girl's clothes are pretty as well as comfortable. It is not possible for pins to prick her tender flesh, because they are never used about her dress. In summer she wears a silk or linen garment made very much like your papa's dressing-gown, except that it has immense sleeves. Beautiful scarlet flowers are embroidered all over it, and a wide sash is wound around her waist and tied in a big, flat bow behind. She is very fond of red, so she has a bow of

red crape in her hair, and a small red bag is fastened to her belt in front. What do you suppose she carries in the bag? Paper handkerchiefs! Not linen ones like yours, which are washed when they get soiled, but rather of soft, pretty paper. As soon as each one is used it is thrown away. Don't you think that is a very nice and cleanly custom? Indeed, there are many things about the Japanese which we might copy with profit, for they are the cleanest people in the world. Perhaps another reason why our little cousin is so happy is because she is always clean.

Lotus Blossom carries another bag at her belt, filled with amulets. These are charms to keep away any evil spirits that might do her harm. In the bag with the charms, there is a brass plate, which tells her name and where she lives. So if she should get lost, her mother need not worry, for she will be brought safely home without loss of time. But what can be the use of such big sleeves? When her mamma cut them, she made them long enough to nearly reach the floor. Then they were doubled up inside and fastened in front so that they could serve as pockets. How you would laugh to see Lotus Blossom and her brother tuck away their playthings in their big sleeves when their mother calls them away to do something for her! It is enough to make an American boy's heart fill with envy. He may boast of six pockets, but what of that? They could all be filled and stowed away in one of Lotus Blossom's sleeves, and room would be still left.

The little girl's life is like a long playtime. In the first place, she lives in a sort of play-house. There is nothing to get out of order; no chairs in the way, no table-scarfs to pull down, no ink-wells to tip over. There is only one big room in the house, but there are many beautiful paper screens, so her mamma can divide the house just as she pleases by moving the screens about. If company should arrive suddenly, there need be no question whether there is a guest-room or not. One can be made with screens in a moment. Even the front of the house is made of screens, which can be closed at night, and folded away in the morning to open up the whole house to the fresh air and sunshine. There are no carpets on the floors, but instead of these there are pretty mats made of rushes. They are exactly alike in size, and are shaken every morning. There are no chairs, for Lotus Blossom's family sit on the mats or on cushions on the floor. They cannot lean against the walls either, for remember, there are no walls! And if they should lean against the screens they would tumble over.

The only tables are six inches high. They are pretty and delicate, and are highly lacquered. When Lotus Blossom has nothing else to do, she likes to look at the pictures on these little stands. But where are the stoves? How do the people keep warm in the cold winter days? And where is all the cooking done? In the picture do you see a little box with smoke rising from it? It is lined with metal, and charcoal is burned in it. All the food is prepared over these little fire-boxes. If any one is cold, he has only to get a fire-box, light some charcoal, and sit down beside it. And when Lotus Blossom goes to breakfast, she has a fire-box beside the lacquered table, so that water for her tea can be kept hot.

Tea! you say. That little girl, nine years old, drinking tea? Yes, we have to admit that the Japanese child drinks tea at a very early age; and with no milk or sugar, either. But then the cups are so tiny they do not hold much. They are no bigger than those in a doll's china set. How quickly the little tea-table is set at meal times. Each member of the family has one all to himself. There is no table-cloth, no knife, or fork, or spoon; instead of these one sees a pair of chop-sticks, a small cup and saucer, and a plate from which he eats the steaming rice and the minced fish. But suppose that the tea or rice should be spilled on the beautiful table? Please don't imagine such a thing. Japanese children are too carefully trained by their kind mammas to be so careless. They handle their chop-sticks so daintily that no grain of rice nor bit of fish falls as they lift the food to their pretty mouths.

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Where does our little Japanese cousin sleep in this funny house? There are no bedsteads, or mattresses, or blankets, or sheets. When bedtime comes, her papa and mamma move the screens around so as to shut themselves off from the rest of the house. Then they go to a cupboard and take down some wadded quilts and queer wooden blocks, whose tops are slightly curved. A quilt is spread on the floor, and a wooden block serves as a pillow. Some paper is laid on it so that it may be kept clean. And now, you think, Lotus Blossom may get into her bed after she has undressed and put on her night-dress. Not so, however. She must bathe in a tub of such hot water that it would turn your body very red, if you were only to hop in and out again. The whole family bathe in the same tub of water, one after the other, and it is kept hot by a tube which runs to a fire-box. The little girl puts on her day-dress after her bath is finished, and, lying down on the quilt, she rests her head on the hard pillow. Mamma covers her with another quilt, and she is soon sound asleep.

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When Lotus Blossom was two years old her brother Toyo was born. How the family rejoiced at having a little son! When he was only seven days old a very important ceremony was performed. He had to receive a name. His papa, who believes in the religion of Shintoism, fully wrote out five of his favourite names on pieces of paper. Then he took his baby in his arms, and, carrying the papers, he went to the temple where he worshipped. The papers were handed to the priest, who placed them in a bowl. After some ceremony, the priest began to fish in the bowl with a sacred wand. The first paper he lifted out bore the name of Toyo. This was the way that Lotus Blossom's little brother received his name. When he was about four weeks old he was again carried to the temple by his father and nurse. The Japanese believe in one great power, or god, but under him there are many others; as, a god of flowers, a god of art, and so forth. This time he was put under the care of his special god, who was then expected to protect him for the rest of his life.

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All this time Toyo's head was kept perfectly smooth. In fact, his first visit to the barber was very important, for all his hair was shaved off then except a little fringe at the back and sides. When he was four months old another important ceremony was held. Toyo left off baby clothes and was given his first solid food. That was rice, of course, which he would continue to eat at every meal for the rest of his life.

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Toyo and Lotus Blossom are always happy together. His sister was the first one to help Toyo squat on his little heels. Japanese babies never creep. The little brother had no baby-carriage or cradle, but he never missed them. He was always such a happy little fellow; never perched up in a high-chair with his body fastened in by a wooden tray, but always moving around, sometimes on the floor, sometimes fastened on mamma's or nurse's back, again on the older children's backs, when Lotus Blossom was out playing in the garden with them. When he got tired he would simply go to sleep, while the children would keep on with their play. But when he woke up, he would look about with a dear little smile, as much as to say: "I'm all right, thank you, don't fret about me."

It was a most important time when he cut the first tooth, and not only that, but the second and the third,—in fact, every tooth in turn had its arrival celebrated. A poem about each one was written by his loving papa, and a little festival was held in the home. Such happy, childlike people are the Japanese! They are ready to enjoy everything. Even the funerals are cheerful, and have nothing sad and dreary about them. Why should they, when the people believe that they always will live, and that they will come back to earth again to enjoy the beautiful fields and flowers and sunshine in new bodies?

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Almost the first words that Toyo learned to speak were, "Thank you," and "If you please." Don't think for a moment that he ever did such a rude thing in his life as to answer "no" or "yes" without some very polite expression with it. For instance, if his mamma asked him a question, he would answer with his baby lips, "No, thank you, most admirable mother," or, "If you please, my adorable, honoured parent," at the same time bowing his little body over till his head reached the ground. Why! he and Lotus Blossom are taught to speak respectfully even of the potatoes or the dishes or the table. For example, they say, "the highly respected cup," etc. Isn't it funny? But, after all, isn't it nice, too, to act kindly toward every one and everything in the world?

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If her little brother should step on Lotus Blossom's doll and break its arm, what would she do? Give him a slap and say, "Oh, you bad, bad boy?" By no means. A slap is unknown in her land. The little woman would not even let herself look cross or unhappy, while Toyo would spend five minutes in telling her how unutterably sad and broken-hearted he was made by his cruel, ungentlemanly carelessness. And then, to make them forget all about it, mamma would bring a new doll from the cupboard.

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But perhaps Lotus Blossom is tired of playthings, so she and Toyo run out in the garden to have a frolic with their pets. They have new ones nearly every day, for they are fond of every

creature that is alive. To-day they are going to hunt for some big beetles, as Toyo has planned a little carriage which he will make out of paper, with pasteboard wheels and reins of silk thread for the paper doll. The beetles will be harnessed, and the children will train them to draw the carriage. Jolly fun! The whole afternoon is spent in finding some black beauties and playing with them.

Another day the children will catch some grasshoppers and tame them. Toyo will make a pretty paper cage to hold them, while both he and Lotus Blossom will be very careful to feed them regularly on the dainties they like best. When night comes the turtles must be looked after and fed, for Toyo has some beauties. He likes to fasten a string through the shell and take them walking, just as his American cousins do, but he would not willingly torture them. [24]

Lotus Blossom has a globe full of gold-fish different from any you have ever seen. Their tails are fan-shaped, and are as long as their bodies. During the long summer days the globe of fish is set out on the broad balcony, and many children stop to watch them as they pass. Toyo loves his little dog more than all his other pets. He is the dearest little fellow, and wishes to follow his young master wherever he goes. He looks somewhat like a spaniel, except that he is white. His nose is turned up at the end, so that he looks all the time as if he would say, "Humph! I am very wise. You poor people don't know much." And he looks all this in such a way as to make you wish to laugh. Toyo's mamma has made a big scarlet ruff for the dog's neck, and it makes him feel very fine, I dare say. His master has fastened a wooden label on his collar to tell where he belongs. [25]

I know you will be disappointed when you learn that Lotus Blossom's dear little kitten cannot play with her tail. No fun for her, poor kitty, you are thinking. But why is it? Because she *has* no tail, or at least only the stub of one. So of course she is quite calm and solemn—that is, for a kitten. But then she lives in Japan, and so she ought to be more dignified than kittens of other lands. Don't you think so?

We must leave all these pets now and go to church, or rather to the temple, with Toyo, Lotus Blossom, and their parents. There is no set day for worship, for there is no such thing as Sunday in Japan. The temples are always open, and the children are fond of going to them to offer prayers, and also to have a good time. As they near the temple they see stands of sweetmeats and good things of all kinds. The way is lined on both sides with these stands. Great numbers of people, rich and poor, high and low, are coming and going. Pigeons are flying in and out of the sacred building, and no one harms them. Toyo stops and buys a yen's worth of corn and scatters it for the birds to eat. They flock around him without fear. They are so tame that the children could catch them with no difficulty. But Lotus Blossom and Toyo pass on to the entrance, and, bowing low, take off their clogs.

The inside of the building is almost bare. There are no statues of gods or goddesses, no ornaments,—nothing except an altar with some queer sticks standing upon it. Festoons of white paper hang from these wands, or "gohei," as the Japanese call them. A priest stands behind the altar, and a large cloth is spread out on the floor in front of it. Lotus Blossom and Toyo clap their hands. This is to call the attention of the gods. Then they say a little prayer and throw some money upon the cloth. If they are very good and devout children, perhaps the gods will descend into the temple. The queer papers on the wands are to be the clothing of these great beings. No images are needed, you see, only plenty of paper. Rather hard to understand this, and yet all that is necessary for Toyo and Lotus Blossom is to worship their ancestors properly, and believe that the great spirits are working everywhere in nature. This is the reason they are taught to obey their parents at all times, and never to harm anything living. The children are also taught to believe that the Mikado, the Emperor of Japan, is descended from god-kings who once ruled over the country. This is why such great honour is paid him wherever he goes. Until a few years ago the people thought him so sacred that they ought not to look at him, so he was obliged to stay inside his beautiful palace like a prisoner. But times have changed, and his subjects have a little more common sense nowadays. [26]



"SHE IS SOON SOUND ASLEEP."

After our little cousins have said their prayers and given their money, they go to a dance-hall in another part of the temple. You know by this time that the Japanese like to enjoy themselves. But isn't it a strange idea to have dancing, praying, and feasting in the same place? The dancers are dressed like butterflies. They have beautiful red and gold wings. They are very graceful, but the music is unpleasant to us. Toyo thinks it is fine, and wishes he could play as well. [27]

Now for a good dinner in the restaurant in the next hall, for the boy's father has promised to treat his family to all the dainties of the season,—candied lotus-leaves, and everything they like [28]

best. It is a happy day, and the children wish they could go to the temple oftener.

One morning not long after this, poor little Lotus Blossom woke up with a bad pain in her stomach. Her face and hands were hot. She was not able to get up and go to school. Mamma felt very sad, and at once sent to ask the priest for something to make her little daughter well. You say at once, "Is the priest in Japan a doctor? And will he prepare medicine marked in some such way as this: 'One teaspoonful to be taken each hour?'" No, indeed. Lotus Blossom's mamma received from her queer physician two "moxas," with orders that one of them should be placed on the back of the sick child, and the other on her foot. The direction of the priest was followed, although it made Lotus Blossom very unhappy. I think you would not like it, if you were in her place, for a moxa makes a burn far worse than a mustard plaster does. You know the punk that you use on the Fourth of July to light your firecrackers and fireworks? The moxas are made of a certain kind of pith, and burn slowly just as the punk does. The Japanese believe in the use of moxas for many things,—bad children, sickness, and I can't tell you what else. The impolite boy I told you about, at the beginning of the story, was burned with a moxa, in such a way that he never forgot himself again. As for fevers, why, the moxa is certain to drive away the bad spirits that cause them.

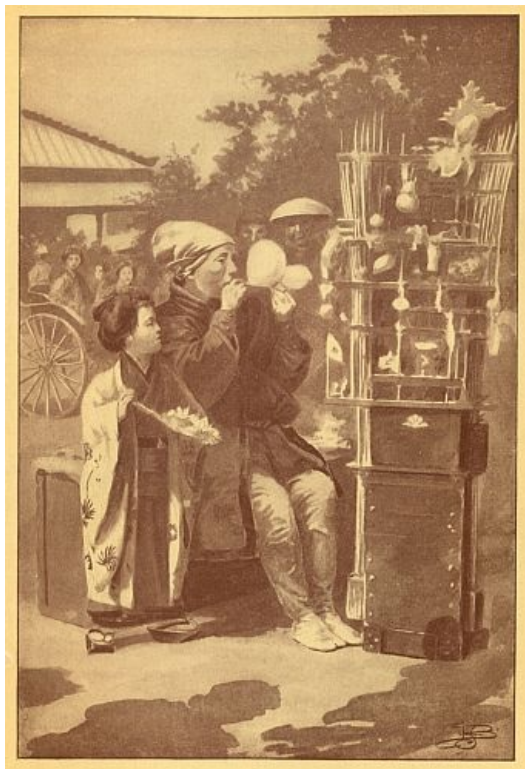
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No doubt you wonder at it, as I do myself, but Lotus Blossom got well enough in two or three days to sit up and be dressed. But she did not care for her dolls or games; she felt tired all the time. Her loving and most honoured father said a change of air would do her good. It would be well for her to spend some days at the house of an aunt who lived several miles out in the country. Toyo was allowed to go, too. How were they to get there? In steam or electric cars? What can you be thinking of to ask such questions? Two jinrikishas were brought to the door; one was for Lotus Blossom and one for her brother. Strong men were hired to draw them. I wonder if you ever saw anything like a jin-riki-sha, or man-power-carriage, for that is what the word means. They are very comfortable, much like baby-carriages, and are lined with soft cushions. The men look strong and kind. They are nearly naked, so that they can run easily and rapidly.

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It will take only an hour to carry the children to their aunt's, if they do not stop on the way. But there are so many things to see to-day that Lotus Blossom forgets all about her sickness and burns, and wants her runners to stop every few minutes to rest. The children spend at least five minutes bidding their mother a proper good-bye. Then, at the word, off they go, down "Dog" Street into "Turtle" Street. There are no sidewalks, but they are not needed, for horses and wagons are rarely seen.

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THE CANDY MAN.

But look! Here is a man standing in the middle of the street, dancing and singing a funny song. The sober Japanese who are passing stop and laugh. The man has a little stand by his side, and on this stand are a dish of wheat-gluten and a bamboo reed. As Lotus Blossom and Toyo draw near, the man ends his song and calls out, "Now who wants me to blow him a candy dog? Or shall it be a monkey eating a nut? You, my most honoured little lady, want one surely."

This he said to Lotus Blossom, who was sitting up straight in the jinrikisha, full of interest. She thought a moment or two, and then asked for a stork with wings spread out to fly. She had hardly stopped speaking before the man seized a bamboo reed, dipped it in the sticky paste, and blowing now this way, now that, fashioned the graceful bird. Pinching it here and there to make it more perfect, he put on some touches of colour from a box of paints. It was wonderfully done. Lotus Blossom gave him five yen for the candy toy, the runners took hold of the jinrikisha, and away the children went on their journey.

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They came soon to another crowd of boys and girls gathered about a batter-cake man. He had a little stand on which a pan of charcoal was burning. A large griddle rested over the coal, and a tiny little urchin was standing on his tiptoes and baking cakes. The man cut them out for him in pretty shapes. See

the pleasure on the youngster's face! All this fun for ten yen, or one cent. The other children watch him in envy. As Toyo and Lotus Blossom draw near, the jinrikisha men make a place for them in the crowd, and Toyo jumps out to get a lunch. He has the next turn, and so he asks the pleasant-faced man to cut his batter-cakes in the shape of turtles. Lotus Blossom does not wish any, but lies back in her easy carriage under her pretty sunshade, and watches Toyo cook and eat them. Umbrellas and sunshades are of the same material in Japan. They are made of several layers of tough, strong paper, and will last a long time. When they are worn out, they are thrown away just as the paper handkerchiefs are, and new ones are bought for a very small sum of money. In stormy weather Lotus Blossom and Toyo not only carry umbrellas, but wear long capes of oiled paper to keep off the rain, while very poor people have coats made of grasses. Funny looking things these are! If you should see a man with one of them over his shoulders, and a

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queer mushroom-shaped hat on his head, you would feel like laughing, I know,—that is, if you had not already acquired some of the politeness of the Japanese themselves.

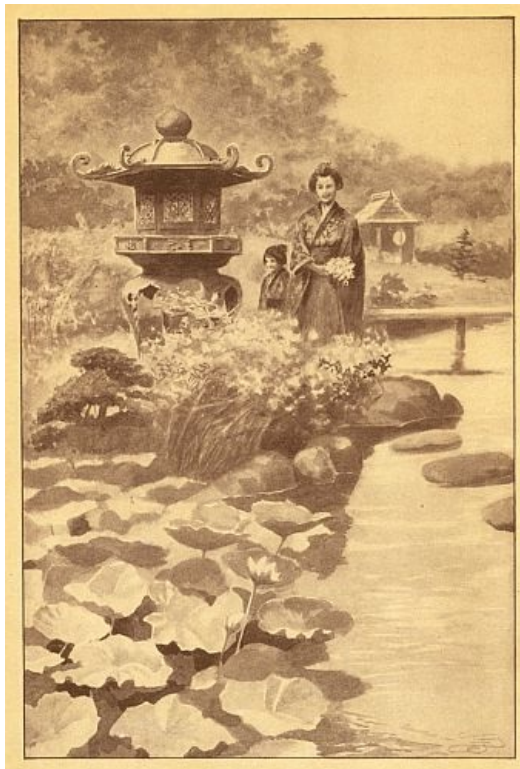
But let us return to Turtle Street and find out what is now attracting the attentions of our little cousins. Would you believe it? They can't be in very much of a hurry to get to aunty's, for they have stopped again. You would also stop if you saw what they do. A travelling street show is entertaining numbers of men, women, and children. Babies are on the backs of some of them, laughing and crowing, too. See that clever fellow in the middle. He is making butterflies of coloured paper and blowing them up into the air. He keeps them flying about, now in one direction, now in another, by waving his fan. It seems as though they must be alive, he does this so cleverly. That yellow butterfly is made to alight on a baby's hand. Hear the little fellow crow with delight. Another flies over Lotus Blossom's jinrikisha, and then, by the dexterous waving of the showman's fan, goes off in another direction before she can catch it.

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After the butterfly show another man performs some wonderful tricks with a ladder. He places the ladder upright on the ground without any support; he climbs it, rung by rung, keeping its balance all the time. Finally he reaches the very top and stands on one foot, bowing and gracefully waving a fan. There is not time to tell you all the wonderful feats of the Japanese. Toyo and Lotus Blossom are delighted, although they have seen performances like these many times before.

But they must really hasten on their journey, for aunty will be expecting them, and it will soon be sunset. In a few moments they leave the city behind and are out in the beautiful country. They pass tea plantations. The glossy green leaves are almost ready to pick. See the man in that field, running wildly about, making hideous noises. Is he crazy? Our little cousins do not seem disturbed as they pass by, for he is only a hired scarecrow. You remember that the people in Japan think it wrong to kill any living thing. But there are great numbers of birds in the country which are likely to eat the crops and do much damage. So men are hired to act as scarecrows and make noises to frighten the birds away.

At last Uncle Oto's rice plantation is reached. The children draw up in front of a large, low house with wide verandas. It is more beautiful than their own home. The roof is magnificent with carvings, and must have cost a great deal of money. It is the pride of Aunt Ocho. The gardens contain the choicest plants and trees, besides a pond and an artificial waterfall. Lotus Blossom and Toyo are sure of a good time and much fun. They will have a great deal to tell their mamma when they return to their home.



AUNT OCHO'S GARDEN.

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Time passes by. The children have been back in their own home a long time. They are now looking forward to New Year's day. Everything is excitement about the house. Mamma has hired an extra servant to help clean the house from right to left; not from top to bottom, as we say, for there are no stairways or rooms overhead. Everything is on one floor, remember. The screens are carefully wiped, the mats receive an extra shaking, and then mamma brings out her choicest vase from the storehouse and places it on a beautiful, ebony stand in the place of honour. The Japanese are not at all like us. They are so simple in their tastes, and love beautiful things so much, that they have only one or two pieces, at the most, on view at a time. They think they can enjoy them more fully in this way.

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The most honoured father orders some workmen to come and set up some tall pine branches in front of the gateway. One is of black, the other of red pine, and tall bamboo reeds are placed beside them. A grass rope is stretched from one reed to the other, and some funny strips of white paper are hung on it. You saw many of these papers at the temple where the children worship. This work is very important to the childlike people. They think that the rope, with papers fastened to it, will keep away all the evil spirits that are ever ready to spoil the happiness of human beings. They are demons, who take the shape of foxes, badgers, and wolves, and are frightful enough to the imagination of Lotus Blossom and her brother. Of course, the children are glad that the evil spirits are to be surely kept away.

Other things are hung on the rope for good luck. There is a piece of charcoal and some seaweed, and a "lucky bag" filled with chestnuts, a bit of herring and some dried fruit. All these things will make the gods understand they are not forgotten.

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The day before New Year's some men come to the house with an oven and proceed to make the grand New Year's cake. It must not be eaten, however, until the 11th of January. The children

stand around and watch the men pound the sticky rice-paste with a heavy mallet. At last it is smooth enough, and then it is cut into rounds and built up into a pyramid. I hear you say, "Well, I'd rather have my mother's plum-cake, any time." But not so with Lotus Blossom and Toyo. They watch their mother anxiously as she places it with great care on a lacquered stand, to remain until the time comes to eat it.

Now they are allowed to put on their clogs and go to buy the "harvest ship," which they will hang up in the house instead of the holly and evergreens you like to see at Christmas time. The Japanese believe that on New Year's eve a wonderful ship comes sailing into port. Of course, it is sent by the gods. No one has ever really seen it. That does not matter; there are pictures of it, nevertheless, and no New Year's decorations are complete without a miniature harvest ship. The shops are as full of them as our markets are of evergreen trees at Christmas time. They are made of grasses and trimmed with gaily coloured papers. The selection of this ship is a very exciting event, not only for Lotus Blossom and Toyo, but also for their mother. How anxiously they look at one after another as the shopkeeper shows them. Finally one is chosen that suits the children's mother as to price and beauty. But the shopping is by no means ended, for presents must be bought for friends and playmates. [41]

And now, children of America, please don't get envious of all the pretty things which your cousins can buy for a few pennies. Lotus Blossom and Toyo have been saving money for a long time. Each has a number of square copper coins strung on a string. They are not like our pennies, for they are larger and thinner, and each one has a square hole in the centre. Ten of these are equal in value to one of our cents, and there are many pretty things that Japanese children can buy for a yen, as this piece of money is called. Such pretty picture-books made of the lovely Japanese paper! Dolls that are dressed in the same fashion as the two children, only the dresses are of paper; pictures of the Japanese gods and goddesses; games and tops and candies. At length the shopping is over and the last yen has been spent. The family are glad to go home and take a hot bath and nap, for they are very tired. [42]

On New Year's morning Lotus Blossom and her brother receive their own presents, and although they do not shout and jump up and down as you do when you are very happy, they are much pleased. Toyo has a drum, some lovely books and a new game of battledore and shuttlecock, which is the game of all games to be played at New Year's. The shuttlecock is a large gilded seed with feathers stuck all around it; the battledore is a bat, flat on one side to strike with, while the other side has a raised figure of a beautiful dancing-girl. Lotus Blossom has, among other things, a doll which her mother has dressed in flowered silk, and a set of lacquered drawers in which to keep her ornaments. But the greatest surprise to the children is a white rabbit. These little creatures are the dearest of all pets in Japan, because they are so rare. It cost the loving father several dollars, but he is more than repaid by his children's delight. [43]

Lotus Blossom's mamma has spent many weeks in embroidering gowns for each member of the family. They are of silk, and are worn for the first time on New Year's day. This good mamma has had her hair arranged for the grand occasion with the greatest of care. You would hardly believe it, but the hair-dresser spent hours upon it, rolling it up in wonderful shapes, sticking it in place with a kind of paste, and fastening many ornaments in it. It was done two days ago, and you may be sure that the Japanese lady placed her head very carefully on the pillow every night so that nothing should disarrange it. She has had her teeth blackened afresh for the greatest holiday of the year, while both she and her little daughter paint their necks and faces white and their cheeks red before their toilets are finished. [44]

I believe I have not yet told you that the pretty Japanese women spoil their good looks as soon as they are married by colouring their teeth black! Isn't it a shame? I'm glad we don't have this custom in our country, aren't you? [45]

And now the New Year's calls begin. What a bowing and bending! Men, women, and children are all calling and lavishing many-worded compliments on each other. Refreshments are passed, and then there is a "show" to amuse everybody. Some men have been hired to come to the house. They dance and sing many songs. After this comes the funny part of the entertainment. One man puts on a mask and makes believe he is an animal. He rolls around on the floor at the ladies' feet, makes queer noises, and everybody laughs and is delighted. The big folks like it as much as the children. Perhaps the funny man will now put on two masks and represent different things at the same time,—on one side he will look like a dancing-girl, while on the other he will appear as some strange beast. He will change about rapidly, and keep the company watching him with excited interest. [46]

Night comes to very tired and happy people, but it does not end the fun by any means. Lotus Blossom's papa will not do any business for a week at least, and there will be new pleasures each day that he is at home with his wife and children. After the festival is over, the family settle down to their daily work until the coming of another holiday.

The children go to school again, but that does not trouble them. They love their teacher and try to please him. The school is closed at noon. Lotus Blossom and Toyo start out every morning with little satchels over their backs. In these they carry their books, a cake of India ink, and a paint-brush. When they arrive at their schoolroom, they are met by a quiet, kindly man with big glasses over his eyes. The children instantly bow down to the ground before him, for he is their teacher. Of course the low bow is to show great respect. Japanese children are taught to treat their instructors, as well as their parents, with honour and regard. [47]

And now they enter the schoolroom. But what a schoolroom! No desks, no platform, no seats! The teacher sits down upon a mat with a small lacquered stand beside him. The children squat on the floor around him and begin to study. What queer letters in the books! You would not be able to read one word. Lotus Blossom and Toyo have already learned their alphabets. You smile, perhaps, and think, "H'm! that isn't much." Well, just wait till I tell you there are forty-seven different characters in one alphabet, while in another there are several times as many. The easy alphabet is the only one that girls must know, while boys learn both. But Lotus Blossom is a very bright child, so she studies the more difficult characters as well.

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Japanese books are printed very differently from ours. The lines run up and down the page, and keep the eyes of the reader busily moving. The children don't have many examples to perform, for the Japanese do not consider arithmetic so important as Americans do. Do you sigh now, and wish you could get your education in that far-away land where long division is not a daily trial? But wait till I tell you about the writing, or rather painting, lessons. You will certainly be envious. When the schoolmaster gives the signal, the children take the brushes and the cakes of India ink from their satchels. They mix a little of the ink with water, and then are ready to paint their words on the beautiful paper made in their country. Many people think that the Japanese are such fine artists because their hands are trained to use the brush from the time they are babies.

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It would make you laugh if I should tell you how the teacher directs the children to write letters to their friends. They must begin by writing something very poetical about the weather. They must then compose some very flowery compliments to the friend who is addressed; a sheet or two, at least, must be used in this way before they are allowed to tell the news, etc. But throughout the letter, as in fact in all conversations, Lotus Blossom and Toyo are taught to speak of themselves as very mean and humble creatures.

Their kind school-teacher ends the morning lessons with proverbs. You know what these are, of course, but the ones which our Japanese cousins learn are especially about duty to their parents, and kindness to all living creatures. It would be a great sin for Toyo to tease the cat or kill a fly. His parents would be shocked beyond expression.

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A LESSON IN ARRANGING FLOWERS.

"How about punishment in the Japanese school?" I hear a little boy ask. My dear child, it is hardly ever needed, but when it does come, it is not being kept after school; it is not a whipping. The child is burned! The teacher takes a moxa, which I told you is a kind of pith, and sticks it on the naughty child's hand. He then sets the moxa on fire to burn slowly. It is a long, sad punishment for any one who is so bad as to deserve it. It does not need to be given every day. Lotus Blossom and Toyo, as well as their little schoolmates, are very attentive to their work, and try their hardest to please the teacher.

When school is done, what will the children do throughout the long afternoon? Lotus Blossom must work a certain time in embroidery, and take a short lesson with her mamma in arranging flowers. Why, there are whole books on this subject in Japan. The people are very fond of flowers, and study how to arrange them in the most graceful manner. They would never think of bunching many together without their leaves in an ugly bouquet, nor would they dream of cruelly twisting wires around their poor little stems. In Japan it is thought an art to know how to place one spray in a vase in such a way as to show all its beauty.

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While his sister is doing her work, Toyo is practising on his koto. This is a musical instrument of which the Japanese are very fond. It looks much like a harp. Toyo strikes the strings with pieces of ivory fastened on his finger-tips. Listen! Do you call those sounds music? It is enough to set one's teeth on edge. Yet Toyo's music-teacher says that he is doing finely and shows great talent. If that is so, I fear we would not care to go to many concerts in Japan, for the Japanese idea of music is very different from ours.

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Hurrah! The children are now ready for play, and there are so many nice things to do. If it is winter and there is snow on the ground, Lotus Blossom and Toyo gather together with their little friends to make a snow man. Not an Irish gentleman with a pipe in his mouth, such as you like to build, but a figure of Daruma, who was a disciple of Buddha. It is easy to make this, for it is believed that Daruma lost his legs from sitting too long in one position. So the snow man has no legs. When it is made, the children knock it down with snow-balls, just as you do.

Spring comes, and with it, tops, and kites, and stilts. The stilts are very high, and Toyo puts his toes through parts of the wooden lifts. He and the other boys run races and even play games on stilts, and think it great fun. But the kites! Yours are just babies beside them. Some of them are so large that it takes two men to sail them. In fact, grown-up people, in Japan, seem as fond of

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kite-flying as the children. Many of these toys have neither tails nor bobs. You wonder how they manage to get up in the air at all, till you see that the strings are pulled in such a way as to raise them. They are of all shapes. The boys sometimes play a game with their kites. They dip the strings in glue and afterward in powdered glass; then they run with the kites and try to cross each other's strings and cut them. The boy who succeeds wins the other's kite. Toyo lost his the other day, and what do you think he did? Pout, or exclaim, as you sometimes do, "I don't care, that isn't fair?" By no means! He made three beautiful bows and gave up his kite with a polite smile. Maybe he did not feel any happier about it than you would, for it was a fine new one, but he wouldn't show his grief, at any rate.

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Toyo sometimes wrestles with the other boys, but they are not rough and noisy about it. They wrestle gently, if you can imagine such a thing. They have often seen the trained wrestlers at the shows; such big, fat men. They must weigh at least three hundred pounds. The fat fairly hangs upon them. The Japanese people are generally slim and rather small, but if a man is going to train himself to be a wrestler, he eats everything that will help to make him fat. I should think they could not get hurt, for they look as though they were cushioned in fat.

The boys of Japan have marbles and tops, just as you do; in fact, nearly all the games which you like best were played by your far-away cousins long before there was a white child on this great continent of ours. "Blind man's buff," "Hide the thimble," and "Puss in the corner," are great favourites with the Japanese. Instead of hiding the thimble, however, they use a slipper, and instead of puss in the corner, they play that it is the devil. You must not forget that the Japanese believe there are many devils, or bad spirits, as well as good ones who are ready to help. They even think of them in their games.

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How many holidays have we in a whole year? Stop and count. Not a great number, we must admit. Lotus Blossom and Toyo have so many that they can count on their fingers the number of days between any two of them. Next best to New Year's, our little girl cousin likes the Feast of Dolls. It comes on the third day of the third month. At that time the stores are filled with dolls,—big dolls, little dolls, dolls dressed like princesses with flounced silk gowns, dolls made up as servants, as dancing-girls, and dolls the very image of the Mikado, the ruler of Japan,—nothing but dolls and dolls' furniture. When the great day arrives, Lotus Blossom's mamma makes a throne in the house. She brings out the two dolls that she herself received when she was born, besides those of her mother and grandmother and great-grandmother! They have been carefully packed away in soft papers in the family storehouse. What a sight they are, with all the new ones that have been bought for Lotus Blossom. The Mikado doll is first placed on his throne, surrounded by his court, and then the soldiers and dancers and working people are made to stand at either side. They are dressed in the proper clothing that belongs to their position. But this grand array is not all. There are all kinds of doll's furniture, too,—little tables only four inches high, with dolls' tea-sets, the tiniest, prettiest china dishes. There are the wadded silk quilts for the dolls to sleep on, and wooden pillows on which the doll-heads can rest. Yes, there are dolls' fans, and even dolls' games.

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On this great occasion there is a dinner-party for the whole family of dolls. Lotus Blossom and her little friends, as well as her father and mother, are quite busy serving their guests with rice, fish, soup, and all kinds of sweet dainties. Somehow or other, all these nice things are eaten. What wonderful dolls they have in Japan, don't they?

Toyo enjoys the day as well as Lotus Blossom, but still he is looking forward to the fifth of May. That will be his favourite time of all the year. By that time the girls' dolls will be put away, and the stores will be filled with boys' playthings,—soldiers, tents, armour, etc. Toyo's father will place a tall bamboo pole in front of the house, and hang an immense paper fish on the top of it. The fish's mouth will be wide open, so that the air will fill his big body. At some of the other houses there will be a banner instead of a fish. There are figures of great warriors who fought in olden times on these banners.

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When Toyo was a baby his father bought him a banner stand. It has been kept very carefully, and is now put in the place where the doll's throne stood a little while ago. The banners of great generals are hung up, and figures of soldiers are placed on the stand. You see Toyo has dolls as well as his sister. Everything is done to remind boys of war at this Festival of Banners. They have processions in the streets. They play a game in which they form armies against each other. Every boy carries a flag, and those of one company try to seize the flags of the boys in the other. Of course the side wins which first succeeds in gaining the flags of the other.

A festival which everybody loves is the Feast of Lanterns. It is in the summer time, and the children are dressed in their gayest clothes. They form processions and march through the streets singing with all their might. Every child carries a large paper lantern and keeps it swinging all the time. It is such a pretty sight in the evening light,—the bright dresses, the graceful figures, the gorgeous lanterns. Oh, Japan is the land of happy children, young and old.

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One pleasant summer afternoon, as Lotus Blossom and Toyo were playing on their veranda, they noticed some one stopping at the gateway and then coming up the walk to the house. It was the man-servant who worked at the home of a friend of theirs, whose father was very rich. Toyo whispered, "Oh, Lotus Blossom, I believe he's bringing us an invitation to Chrysanthemum's party. You know she is going to have one on her birthday." Sure enough, the man came up to the children, and, making a low bow, presented them with two daintily folded papers and then departed. They hastened to open them, and found, with delight, that they were really and truly asked to their friend's party. It was to be at three o'clock in the afternoon of the following

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Thursday. Lotus Blossom ran to her mother, just as her American cousins might do, and cried, "Oh, mamma, my precious, honourable mother, what shall I wear? See this; do look at my invitation." It was a rare thing indeed to see the child so excited. Her mother smiled, and answered, "My dear little pearl of a Lotus Blossom, I have almost finished embroidering your new silk garment. It shall be finished, and you shall have a new yellow crape kerchief to fold about your throat. A barber shall arrange your long hair about your head; and I will buy you white silk sandals to be tied with ribbons. Even though your friend is more wealthy than ourselves, you shall not disgrace your honoured father. Toyo, too, must have a new garment." [61]

All was made ready, and Thursday came at last. The children were sent to the party in jinrikishas, so that they should not get dusty. They looked very pretty. Their little hostess and her mamma received the guests with smiles and with many long phrases of politeness. Lacquered trays were brought in and placed in front of each one. On these were beautiful china cups with no handles. What do you think was served in them? Don't get up your hopes now and say "lemonade," or "sherbet," for you will surely be disappointed. It was tea,—simply tea, without milk or sugar. The children drank it in honour of their hostess and her mamma. But something better still was to come. The tea was removed, and fresh trays, covered with dainty pink papers, were brought in. A cake made of red beans lay on the middle of each tray, and around it were placed sugar maple leaves coloured red and green. They looked pretty enough to keep, but the little guests ate them, leaves and all. After these came other cakes and sweetmeats, enough to delight the heart of every one. [62]

Now for games! Proverbs come first of all. It is played very much like the American game of "Authors," and is a great favourite with both old and young in Japan. Next comes blind man's buff, but you would hardly know the game, it is played so much more quietly and slowly than you are in the habit of playing it.

Wine-cakes, dainties, and tea are served next, and then the best part of the fun arrives. The screens are moved aside, and the children behold a little stage. They sit, or rather squat, down on the mats about the room while some hired performers represent one of their loved fairy stories in a play. The actresses have lovely gowns, and are very graceful. It is a very enjoyable occasion. [63]

The time to leave comes all too soon. The jinrikisha men arrive, and after assuring their hostess that they never had had so lovely a time before, Lotus Blossom and Toyo make two deep bows and return home very happy. I believe you would not object to a party like that yourself, would you?

Among all the joyous festivals of the year, I must not forget to tell you of the plum-viewing. The winter season is very short in Japan, and the houses are not built to keep out the cold very well, as you must have already perceived. When the spring days arrive and the blossoms begin to appear, the child people are very happy. If they are happy, of course they must show it. How can they do it so well as by having out-door picnics in the plum orchards? The children watch for the great day's arrival when the flowers will be in full bloom. They save up their yen to spend, and plan for a great good time. No school on that day! No practising on the koto! No embroidery for Lotus Blossom! Every one is up early on the bright, clear morning, and baskets are filled with the nice luncheon mamma has prepared. There is actually an air of excitement in the quiet Japanese household. The good father leads the family procession as they start out on their walk to the picnic grounds. It is about two miles from their home. Other families join them as they walk along. The throng of gaily dressed and happy people grows larger every moment. As they near the plum-orchard they find the road lined with stands, which have been put up for the day. It seems as though everything one could desire were on sale: cakes, tea, fruit, fans, sweets of all kinds, toys, etc. No wonder Lotus Blossom and Toyo wanted to save up their money. But the orchard! Was there ever a lovelier sight? Hundreds of trees loaded with fragrant pink blossoms! [64]

The people write poems about them, and pin them on the branches, to show how much they appreciate the beautiful sight which Nature has given them. Tea-drinking, story-telling, and the entertainments of travelling showmen take up the day. Sunset bids them leave the beautiful scene and go back to home and work. [65]

And now, children, we must bid these dear cousins good-bye for a little while. Although they worship in strange ways, and read their books upside down, besides doing many other things in a manner that seems strange to us, yet we can learn much from their simple, childlike natures. And, after all, isn't one reason why we live in this big world and are so different one from another, that we may learn from each other? [66]

THE END.

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