



THE HORSELESS CARRIAGE OF JAPAN

By Onoto Watanna

ILLUSTRATED BY KARL J. ANDERSON



ALTHOUGH the jinrikisha is by far the most conspicuous and numerous of all vehicles presently used in Japan, and foreigners have come to regard it as a very old and Oriental institution, yet as a matter of fact it is only three decades since it was introduced into that country by Takayama Kosuke and two others, who claimed to be its inventors, though their claim was disputed by an American missionary. However the dispute, it was Takayama Kosuke and his partners who first obtained government permission to use it. It consisted in these days of nothing more than a box supported by four props, which rested on the axle connecting the two wheels. There were no springs on the vehicle, and it was most uncomfortable.

However, one Akiba Daisuke, a native of Yedo, and a man of much skill in mechanical devices, saw the possibilities in the then crude vehicle, and to him is due the vast improvements that have made the jinrikisha the most popular, comfortable and altogether delightful two-wheel carriage that it is to-day. Soon after the Restoration, when his former calling of supplying arms and saddlery to the Samourai was no longer possible, he opened a workshop in Ginza, the main street of Tokyo, and began the manufacture of the improved jinrikisha; and so successful was he in making his vehicle all that could be desired in the way of comfort and elegance, that in a few years he had amassed a vast fortune.

The vehicles built by Akiba Daisuke for the private use of his richest customers were said to be works of art, and there have never been, nor are there existing to-day, any like them, save such as are kept as curios and heirlooms in some families. The body of the vehicle was lacquered black, yellow, green, crimson, and adorned with beautifully colored representations of warriors, actors, women, birds, beasts, fish, trees, arabesques and famous sceneries, and on its back the owner's name and crest were worked in gold. The inside of the vehicle was padded with the finest rice-straw, and the embroidery was so thick and heavy that it was hardly possible to see a spot of the original plain surface of silk or satin. It would be difficult to give more than a faint idea of the extreme elegance and luxury of these exquisite old lacquer jinrikishas, which are practically extinct to-day.

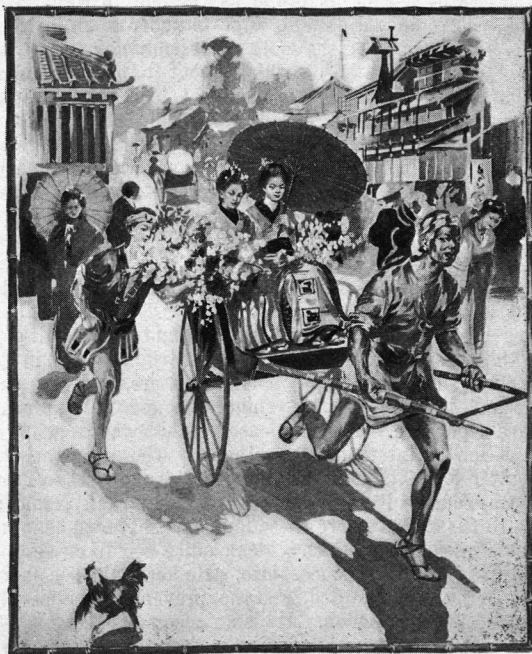
THE jinrikisha by its superiority in speed and comfort rapidly pushed from the market its predecessor, the palanquin. To-day the palanquin is seldom used save for the carrying of the sick to hospitals. However, the appearance of the jinrikisha, while pushing aside the palanquin, by no means was a source of grief to the former palanquin-bearers. On the contrary, they only too gladly threw down the heavy poles by which the palanquin was carried on their shoulders to take in hand the light shafts of the jinrikisha.

The jinrikisha-man waits at the street-corners and solicits fares, though this is contrary to the exact police regulations. However, the jinrikisha-man is not always as principled as he might be, and has little, if any, regard for the police or his regulations. He has no compunction whatever in overcharging the scale of fares set by the police, but as a rule the customer himself pays but little attention to this. The fare is usually higgled over before riding, and while they walk, and sometimes great distances are covered before terms have been reached. The jinrikisha-man also generally (unlawfully) demands drink-money, especially when he is forced to wait at tea-houses or pleasure resorts on the road. He is constantly being set on by the police for charging more than agreed on, threatening to put down female customers unless his demands are acceded to, etc. However, as I said before, the jinrikisha-man has great contempt for these same regulations, though he obeys them minutely as regards the rules of the road, which are also set by the police. The jinrikisha must always take the left side of the road where there is a carriageway apart from the footway; where there is no distinction the middle of the road is taken. On meeting other vehicles, horses or foot-passengers the left side must be taken, but the jinrikisha must go to the other side on meeting troops, artillery or commissariat-wagons. The occupied jinrikisha has the right of way in meeting an empty one. When a jinrikisha

desires to overtake another ahead of it, it is necessary to first call out, when the latter moves to the right to let it pass. At a street-corner a jinrikisha turns sharply to the left, but wheels in a large curve to the right. Postal-carts, horses, engines of fire-brigades, water-carts, funerals, etc., all these send the jinrikisha to the wall. By following these really simple instructions collisions are avoided.

THERE are three classes of jinrikisha-men—those serving in private houses, those plying their trade under a jinrikisha-keeper, and those working on their own account. The first-named is said to lord it over the other jinrikishamen. He is a private servant, and as such it is not necessary for him to abide by the police laws and regulations regarding his clothes or his vehicle.

The jinrikisha-man of the second class has a harder time of it. He lives with a great many others in a jinrikisha-house, and is entirely under the dominion of his keeper, who receives the fares and is responsible altogether for the good or bad conduct of his men. For his services he receives a percentage of his earnings, and his board and lodging. Extra tips and drink-money are, however, all his own. His clear profits in earnings amount to perhaps about three yen (three dollars) a



A MORNING DRIVE IN TOKYO

month. This, of course, exclusive of all expenses, and little as it might seem to the Western hack-driver or cabby, three dollars a month is not so lightly regarded by a poor Japanese jinrikisha-man. The freest but poorest of the jinrikisha-men are those who work on their own account. The majority of them hire a jinrikisha for the day, paying four to eight sen (four to eight cents) a day. They make on the vehicle perhaps twenty to thirty sen a day. The independent jinrikisha-man joins a street-stand and takes his chances with scores of others.

UYENO and Shimbashi are the two great terminal stations of Tokyo, and the jinrikishas are thick in the railway inclosures. At these places the trade is found very profitable, and to hold a position on one of these stands a jinrikisha-man must pay a pretty good price.

There are over four thousand jinrikisha-men who ply their trade at nights, sleeping during the day. They lie in wait for belated passengers and revelers, and are more successful than those who work by the day, as after midnight the fare is usually excessive. The experienced ones scorn to take fares for a short distance, and only look out for passengers who will pay well.

The jinrikisha-man employed in private houses is, however, the best off of all. He is generally of a better class and sometimes holds his position for a lifetime.

It is unfortunate that foreigners are forced to give harsh judgment against these men as a class, for it is almost impossible to travel in Japan without them constantly with you. Owing to the poor and hard circumstances under which most of them exist, the jinrikishaman is by no means one of the delights of Japan, picturesque as he and his vehicle generally are.

A woman hiring a vehicle, for instance, may sometimes find herself in the heart of a forest, within impossible walking distance of any town or point, and a surly man demanding extra fare or threatening to "dump" her. Counter-threats do not effect him. Better pay and be done with it. His fare, after all, is so small and slight you do not mind if he does double it. Fancy being pulled in a vehicle for forty miles at a stretch for the miserable charge of five or ten sen! Pay him well; he can give you more information of the country and people than all the marquises and counts and nobles who give banquets in honor of your honorable presence in Japan, and of the full moon, local fêtes, flowers, snow. The banquets are delightful, your host's pretty pretenses of servility more delightful, but you learn no more of the country and people at such a party or banquet than that they drank the saké hot in little cups which went thirty or more to the pint, had the geisha-girls to sing and dance and amuse you, and watched your pleasure constantly. This and other surface acquaintances are all the foreigner usually has of the Japanese, and there can be no conception of the actual difference of the real life of the people to that seen at these functions.

BUT the jinrikisha-man will show you the graves of the lovers who committed joshi to become wedded in death; he will tell you their pretty, pitiful romances, and the reason why lovers pray at their graves; he will tell you the history of all the old shrines and temples; he knows scores of the country people who smile in their friendly way at you as you fly past their pretty homes. He knows the best nakoda to whom to go if a wife is desired; indeed, he himself will act in the capacity, for does he not know where the nicest and prettiest girls abound? In fact, when you have melted his heart with a handful of sen he becomes a friend worth having. It is true he may "spot" you as being one whom it is worth his while to keep in touch with during your entire visit in the city, and you will find it difficult to leave your hotel without encountering him hard by, importunately soliciting your patronage, though on each and every occasion he will call to you as though you were an utter stranger to him and he has never seen you before, or does not recognize you as the person who tipped him so well the previous day.

In these days, when the streets are literally lined with vehicles of all sorts and kinds, when carriages of the most approved kind brush by smart dog-carts and antiquated shandrydans, or are overtaken by public stages called by courtesy "omnibuses," or race with tram-cars, the most conspicuous, numerous and popular is the light two-wheeled jinrikisha, with its comfortable spring-seat and shady calash-top. A tourist rushes joyously for one the first thing, if only "to try what it feels like;" a Japanese gentleman steps into it whenever he leaves his house or store; pleasure-parties hire a score of them at once. Imagine a picnic-party made up of a score or more of them, each with two passengers! How delightful for lovers!

Some chronic whiners still insist that the jinrikisha is an evil, and has made the nation who formerly were noted for their activity (a distance of forty or fifty miles being thought nothing of for walking by an average young man) indolent and lazy. In spite of this, however, the majority of people (foreigners and Japanese) consider the jinrikisha one of the most delightful features of this delightful country, and one which would rob it of much of its charm were it abolished. Public sentiment in the main is strongly opposed to substituting car-lines, and most of the people dread its advent, which, unfortunately, seems inevitable. And with the abolishment of the jinrikisha thousands of men will be thrown out of employment. It is a necessity and a luxury to-day. How soon it will be before its days are numbered cannot be said.