



## AN ORIENTAL HOLIDAY

By Onoto Walanna

Illustrated from new Japanese photographs



WHAT Christmas is to the Westerners, New Year's is to the Japanese, although congratulations and greetings are not merely confined to the first day of the New Year, but at any time between the first and fifteenth. This is the time of universal peace and good-will in Japan; when the inhabitants of the little Empire prepare to start life anew, with all bad feelings done away with and fine promises and resolutions for the future. In fact, the first of January bears the significant title of Gan-san (the Three beginnings), meaning the beginning of the year, the beginning of the month and the beginning of the day. One might be tempted to add to this "The beginning of a new life," for so realistically and conscientiously do the Japanese try to observe the almost national rule of striving earnestly to make themselves better at this time that it becomes an almost literal belief with them that they have succeeded. That is a pretty truth, I think—that a good belief generally tends to make the good reality.

### PREPARATIONS.

SOMEHOW, though the sun may have shone just as brightly on the previous day, and indeed the whole year round, and all things in nature bear the same aspect, yet it all seems different. It is the spirit of the New Year. Then, too, the busy workers who have been preparing nearly a month ahead for this season, have laid aside the bamboo duster and broom, and a general quiet and happiness seems to reign over the Land of Sunrise. The first of January is the only day in the year on which all stores are closed, as the merchants do not recognize the Sabbath or other holidays. This day is a universal holiday; and many, many happy families rise very early in the morning to worship the first rising sun of the New Year.

### CONGRATULATIONS.

"HAPPY New Year!"—"Happy New Year," is heard everywhere, and the shining, smiling faces of the little people beam with earnestness and light-heartedness; the very birds seem to be trilling in a tender tone, and the exquisite wild plum blossom (the Nume) breathes its perfume and loveliness over all, while the soft strains of the beautiful national hymn might be heard from a thousand homes, mingled with the accompaniment of the koto and the samisen. On this day all the members of a family congratulate each other the first thing in the morning and then sit at tables, each one having a little one to themselves, the table being perhaps not over half a foot high. Spiced cake is then passed around, symbolic of the wish that each one may drink a cup of immortality, then soup follows, and they all wish the others ten thousand years of joy.

### CLEANING THE HOUSE.

THE streets, houses and gardens are gayly decorated with pine and bamboo, for the Japanese venerate both of these, because they keep green through the entire winter, and are symbols of longevity. The Japanese begin to prepare for New Year's about the middle of December. Even the very poorest people give their little houses a thorough re-cleaning, laying new mats of rice straw and cleaning every nook and corner with fresh bamboo dusters, symbolizing prosperity and good fortune. On the second of January the streets are brilliantly illuminated with lanterns, and hung with the national flag and streamers of bunting, and the shrill calls of processions of vendors are heard everywhere.

### THE HOLIDAY SPIRIT.

"OTAKARA! Otakara! Otakara!" "Treasure Ship! Treasure Ship! Treasure Ship!" There they come, walking slowly at the back of their richly laden carts, drawn by oxen decorated with flags and cloths of every color, and behind



"THEY ARE ENTWINED ABOUT EACH OTHER"



"BROKEN DOWN FROM OVERWORK"

them and all along the way beside them follow a surging crowd of happy children and holiday seekers. Now some vender pauses a moment to exchange a word with a jinriki-man and the crowd pauses also. Once in awhile some little bit of humanity, in the shape of a very small boy, gets mixed up in the crowd and loses his bearings. A little tear-stained, desolate face peers at you out of the crowd. Soon some one has lifted him high on their shoulders, crying aloud: "Who owns this august baby?" Then perhaps the kind-hearted treasure vender slips into his little hand some tawdry, bright toy and the little dirty, tearful, grimy face becomes suddenly restored to its wonted serenity and happiness, as he is restored to his parents. Ah! but the good-will of the New Year's has touched even the rough heart of the veriest peddler and vender.

### HAPPY ANTICIPATIONS.

THE little Japanese child looks forward to the New Year with as much eagerness as does the little American boy to Christmas. This same feeling of expectancy and joy at the prospect is

very contagious in Japan, and almost as soon as the month of December sets in the grown people as well as the children begin to talk about it, many of them even beginning preparations that early. Especially are the young girls interested in it, and often one comes across gay, laughing groups, some of them busy sewing or fashioning odd toys and presents, others planning what they propose to do or buy, and again others whispering together and trying to make their companions believe that they propose doing something very remarkable and mysterious at that time.

### NEW GOWNS.

THE young girls learn a new tune on the koto or samisen, and make themselves new

gowns, generally of the prettiest and most extravagant shades and patterns. They are indefatigable workers at this time, these little women, sewing and embroidering from morning till night, and are as much interested in a new gown as the most stylish parisienne lady that ever stepped. In fact, when the New Year's finally sets in, there is always some one who has broken down from overwork. Perhaps she is an older sister who has had to make not only her own but her sister's gowns.

### MEANING OF NEW YEAR'S.

ALWAYS before the New Year's sets in the parents gather little ones together and try to instill into them the meaning of the New Year's, so children, large and small, try their little best to be unusually good, docile and obedient during this season. Though they play happy games throughout the entire day, yet they will endeavor to be as gentle and obedient as possible. Looking at a group of Japanese children sometime during the New Year's season, a Westerner is struck more than ever by the innate gentleness and refinement

of the people, which is shown even among the most boisterous of children. It is at this season, too, that the youngsters strive to show the best specimens of their penmanship, and try to outdo each other in obedience and goodness at this time.

#### STREET PARADES.

IN the days of the Tokugawas the most imposing ceremonies were held, the streets being constantly filled with the parades of the various Lords and Nobles, but with the dawn of Western ideas, Japan, retaining all her orientalness gave up a great deal of what the reformists termed "useless expense and display." Yet the beautiful parades of Old Japan were said to be as innocent as they were conducive of merriment and good feeling, although some of them might have seemed to foreigners, just as all masquerades and carnivals might be said to be.

#### MAKING CALLS.

THE custom prevails to this day of making hundreds of calls in one day. Jinrikishas are flying hither and thither from one end of the city to the other, and cards are dropped at the doors of friends, relatives and acquaintances, though the occupant of the jinrikisha will not alight save in rare instances. Social gatherings and banquets constitute the features of the entertainments indulged in by the "grown people" during this season.

#### QUIET AMUSEMENT.

IN spite of the general joy and happiness visible everywhere one is struck by the quiet, unobtrusive way in which the Japanese take their pleasure. There is no noisy rioting, no boisterous games, no drunken revelers or screaming children. In fact, the sounds of merriment are so musical that one would miss the sibilant laughter and the happy chatter, which seems to accord with the beauty and sunshine everywhere. How lovable they are to each other at this season; not in the Western fashion truly, of smothering each other with kisses, but in a gentle, quiet way. Many a door-way is framed with three or four sweet little maids, their arms entwined about each other, watching the flying jinrikishas, the antics of some clown or juggler, the processions of the younger children at their games. Sometimes quite big girls will join in these games and seem to enjoy them as much as the children.

#### COURTESIES TO FOREIGNERS.

A WORD about the foreigners in Japan at this season. It must not be thought for a moment that in the enjoyment of this happy time the Japanese forget the strangers on their soil. Any American who has visited Japan at this time would tell you of the pains taken to show them every courtesy and make them feel perfectly at home and welcome by all. The better class and wealthier Japanese often make a point of including the foreigners in their round of visits and many

a happy foreigner will bring back to his own country beautiful and rare gifts from generous and kindly disposed Japanese. But the most touching gifts they usually receive are those given them by their servants or coolies who are very poor. They take great pride at this time in making odd, unexpected little gifts to their American (American) or Egirisu (English) masters and mistresses, assuring them at the same time that "they are a thousand thanks to them until before they

dollars) in buying a present for an American lady who at one time had befriended her. She walked a distance of over fifteen miles in the early morning, in order to reach the home of the lady before the noon hour set in, because she had no money left wherewith to hire a conveyance. The tea house where she was employed was situated on the highway between Tokyo and Kyoto, and the American lady lived in Tokyo. When she finally reached her destination, she sank down on the little

step in front of the house, leaning against the wall, and slipping her shoes, or sandals, from her feet.

"Why, Natsu-san, is that you?" The American lady was standing by her. The girl raised a bright beaming face to hers and displayed her gift joyously.

"Tha's account I lig' you," she said simply in pretty broken English.

The American lady's sweet blue eyes were misty. She knew how little the girl could afford to bring such a gift to her. It was an exquisite silk obi (sash) about fourteen feet long and fourteen inches wide, besides being doubled, and made of the finest material.

"Tha's account this New Year, an' I thing' that I mek' you present, because you-bin'-mos' vaery' kin' to me."

"Why, Natsu-san, what did you bring me this for?"

The American lady had even forgotten wherein she had been kind to the girl. I believe it was that she had at one time saved the girl from being whipped by an unscrupulous master, and had obtained her a good position, her husband having some influence in Tokyo. Perhaps the sweetest characteristic of the Japanese is their innate gratitude for the smallest act of kindness displayed to them.

"It was awfully sweet of you Natsu-san."

The girl made a graceful gesture of dissent. "I nod vaery sweet," she said, "I thing' pretty American lady vaery sweet."

So the general good spirit and feeling spreads to the foreigners as well as the Japanese themselves, and as one surveys the happy, contented faces of this little people, they shudder at the terrible old missionary adage that "man is vile." Ah, not in Japan!

#### A CHARACTERISTIC TRAIT.

The deferential, almost slave-like, courtesy of Japanese women is at once apparent to all who visit that beautiful country. It is a little difficult, at first, to become accustomed to their obsequiousness, as it is to reconcile their doll-like beauty with other standards; and the Westerner will hardly appreciate the feelings of the Japanese student, who, after having visited America, thanked God that his wife and mother were Japanese women.

Yet these dainty little creatures have much in their favor. True, they lack the brilliancy and cleverness of their European sisters, but they possess one trait which has made it possible for them to exercise a marked influence upon the destiny of their nation-obedience. If they wield any power, it is the power of trustful silence. With such women, is it any wonder that Japan has taken her place in the front rank of European nations?



"PLANNING AND FASHIONING ODD TOYS AND PRESENTS"

die," because of the kindness and good treatment they have received in the past from their foreign friends. And they bestow their gifts without any thought of return.



"SEEM TO ENJOY THEM AS MUCH AS CHILDREN"

#### AN INCIDENT.

I KNOW of one especial incident that struck me at the time I heard of it as being so touching, yet pretty, that I think I will tell you of it. One little Japanese girl spent all her little savings, which consisted of a little over seven yen (silver