

THE JAPANESE FLORAL CALENDAR.

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INTRODUCTION.

THE JAPANESE are a nature-loving people and frequently give practical expression to their feelings by taking a holiday simply for "flower-viewing." At the proper season, the entire nation, so to speak, takes a day off and turns out on a big picnic, to see the plum blossoms, or the cherry blossoms, or the maples, or the chrysanthemums. No utilitarian views of the value of time or miserly conceptions of the expense of such outings prevail for a moment; for the Japanese are worshippers of beauty rather than of the "almighty dollar." A few pennies on such occasions bring many pleasures, and business interests are sacrificed at the shrine of beauty. And, as one or more flowers are blooming every month, there is almost a continuous round of such picnics during the year. Having lived in Japan for some time, it is my purpose, therefore, to tell my American countrymen something of the flower or flowers popular each month, with some folk-lore, poems, or other description thereof and have it illustrated by pictures. But first we must call attention to the fact, that the Japanese word *hana* includes, not only a "flower" or "blossom" according to our conceptions, but also twigs, leaves, grasses, etc., so that the pine, the maple, and even the snow may come in this category.

We are confronted at the very outset with a chronological difficulty in presenting this subject to Western readers. For the programme of Japanese floral festivals was originally arranged on the basis of the old lunar calendar, so long in vogue in Japan. By that calendar the New Year came in about the 21st of January to the 18th of February; so that it was from three to seven weeks behind the Occidental solar calendar. For instance, the following is a floral programme according to the "old style":

First month . . . (about February) . . .	Pine.
Second month .. (“ March)	Plum.
Third month . . . (“ April)	Cherry.
Fourth month .. (“ May)	Wistaria.
Fifth month . . . (“ June)	Iris.
Sixth month . . . (“ July)	Tree peony.
Seventh month . (“ August)	Lespedeza.
Eighth month .. (“ September) ..	Eularia.
Ninth month . . . (“ October)	Chrysanthemum.
Tenth month . . . (“ November) ..	Maple.
Eleventh month. (“ December) ..	Willow.
Twelfth month . (“ January)	Paulownia.

But, when Japan adopted the Gregorian calendar, many of the floral festival were transferred to the new style without regard to the awful anachronisms that followed. In the case of the pine, which is chosen for the first month on account of the prominent part that it plays in the New Year's decorations, it makes no special difference whether the New Year begins January 1 or February 18. But in many other cases the calendar suffers serious dislocation, because some of the “flowers” cannot conveniently be moved back a month or more. The autumn full moon, too, in whose festival certain blossoms figured, cannot be arbitrarily hurried up. Hence, it is rather difficult for the flowers of Old Japan to run on the new Occidental schedule.

But, taking all these difficulties into consideration, and harmonising them so far as possible, we have been able to construct the following modern Japanese floral calendar :

January	Pine.	July	Morning-glory.
February	Plum.	August	Lotus.
March	Peach.	September	“Seven Grasses.”
April	Cherry.	October	Maple.
May	Wistaria.	November	Chrysanthemum.
June	Iris.	December	Camellia.

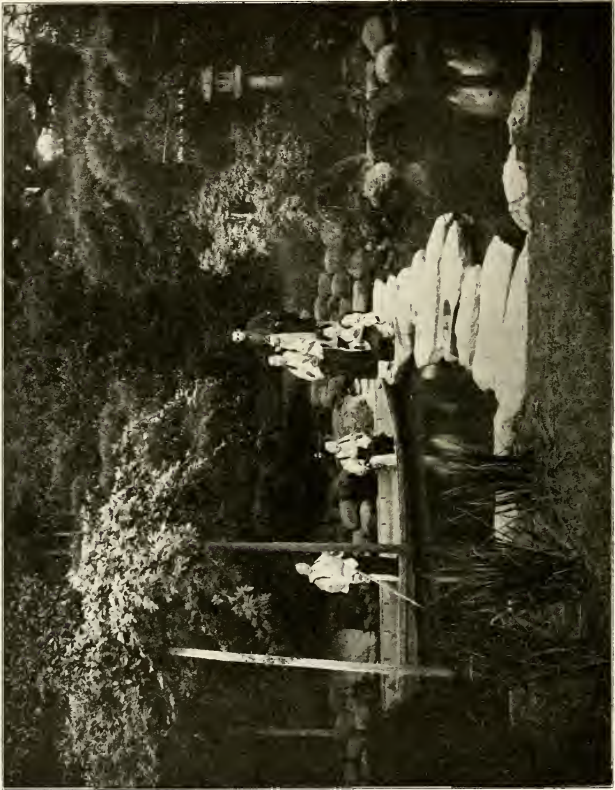
This calendar we shall follow in the articles of this series.¹

¹ The following is an alternative :

January	} Pine and Bamboo.	July	Morning-glory.
February		August	Lotus.
March	Plum.	September	“Seven Grasses.”
April	Cherry.	October	} Chrysanthemum.
May	Wistaria.	November	
June	Iris.	December	Camellia.

I. THE PINE.

For the first month of the year, the pine is the only choice, whether taken separately or in connection with the bamboo and



A PRIVATE JAPANESE GARDEN.

the plum. The decorations in front of every house at the New Year's season are known as *Kado-matsu* (Gate-pines), or *Matsukazari* (Pine-decorations); and the first seven days of the year are collectively called *Matsu-no-uchi*, which may be freely translated

“Pine-week.” The pine, like the bamboo, has no “blossom” in the Occidental meaning of that word, but is regarded as a “flower” by the Japanese; and these two are venerated because they keep green in winter and their color never fades. Therefore, they are



THE NEW YEAR'S GATE-DECORATIONS AND THE "MANZAI" PLAYERS.

emblems of constancy, endurance, health, and longevity. And, as one writer has informed me, the pine, the bamboo, and the plum are the “three friends in winter”; and “they are used as the bearers of good wishes for the New Year: the pine for longevity, the bamboo for uprightness, the plum for sweetness.”

The origin of *Kado-matsu* is very ancient, perhaps so far back as eight hundred and fifty years ago. The two following poems are said to be about eight hundred years old :

“Kadomatsu no
Itonami tatsuru
Sono hodo ni
Haru akegata no
Yoya narinuran.”

(“While busy decorating the pines at the gate, the dawn of the New Year speedily comes.”).

“Haru ni aeru
Kono kado-matsu wo
Wakeki tsutsu
Ware mo chiyo hen
Uchi ni iri-nuru.”

(“Passing through the pine-gate that has met the spring so gay, I too have entered into the life of endless years.”)¹



THE NEW YEAR'S DECORATIONS WITH *Shimenawa*, ETC.

Two girls playing at battledore and shuttlecock, and the little one with ball.

The pines in front of the gate are placed in pairs : the rougher and more prickly one, called the male, on the left, which is the

¹ From *The Far East*.

side of honor in Japan ; the softer and more graceful one, called the female, on the right. The custom of adding bamboos is of more recent origin. This custom of gate-decorations originated, by the way, with the common people.



A BAMBOO GROVE.

The other decorations include a rope, specially named *shime-nawa*, with the strips of white paper, a cray-fish, ferns, a large orange called *daidai*, a leaf or two of an evergreen tree, dried persimmons, dried chestnuts, etc. Each one of these articles has its

own peculiar significance, and is symbolical of good fortune for the year.

As the pine-tree is an evergreen, it is naturally quite popular in floral compositions in which it is considered very felicitous. One favorite combination, especially for the New Year and wedding ceremonies, is that of the pine, bamboo, and plum (*sho-chiku-bai*). If these are used separately, "the pine is displayed on the first, the bamboo on the second, and the plum on the third day of the year." The pine is also commonly associated with the crane and the tortoise, all of which are symbolic of longevity.

The never-fading color of the pine is compared to the chastity of woman, and O Matsu is a very common name for a girl. The needle-shaped leaves of the pine "are credited with the power of driving demons away."

The remarkable dwarf pines are always an important feature of a Japanese garden; and at Karasaki there is a famous giant pine-tree, 90 feet high, with a circumference of trunk over 39 feet, and length of branches (in all 380) from 240 to 288 feet.

Special mention should be made of Matsushima (Pine Islands), near Sendai. These pine-clad isles are considered one of the "three great views" of Japan. They are said to number 896 in all, and are, therefore, called sometimes the "Thousand Isles" of Japan. But in this calculation the smallest rocks are included, even though they may not be visible above water. Many of them have fantastic names to correspond to their fantastic shapes.

Other places famous for pine trees are Sumiyoshi, near Sakai, and Takasago, near Kobe. Indeed, the shore from Kobe westward for some distance is a rare pine-clad coast. "The spirits of two ancient pine-trees at Takasago, personified as man and woman of venerable age, who are occupied in raking up pine-needles, form a favorite subject of Japanese art." These figures are always prominent in the decorations of a wedding ceremony.

As the word *matsu* may mean either "a pine" or "to wait (pine)," there is an excellent opportunity for a pun in both Japanese and English, as in the following lines, translated by Prof. B. H. Chamberlain:

"Matsu ga ne no
Matsu koto tohomi, etc." •

"Like the *pine*-trees, I must stand and *pine*."

The following poem is from the translation of *Tosa Nikki* by Mrs. M. C. Harris:

"Since I have viewed the pines that grow
 On Suminoye's shore,
 I've come my own estate to know,
 How I have e'en surpassed in years
 These pine-trees old and hoar."

In the "Hundred Poems," which furnish the chief amusement for the New Year season, we find the following, translated by Prof. MacCauley:

"SOLITUDE IN OLD AGE.

"Whom then are there now,
 In my age so far advanced,
 I can hold as friends?
 Even Takasago's pines
 Are no friends of former days."

All Japanese boys and girls, early in life, memorise the Hundred Poems by a Hundred Writers, and can glibly repeat them.

Here is a song generally used on the occasion of a wedding, in the decorations of which the pine plays an important part:

"The oceans four that gird our strand
 Are calm, and quiet is our land:
 No branches bend, no breezes blow,
 These new-set pines in bliss will grow."

We close with a very famous poem, which we give in both Japanese and English, as follows:

"Kado-matsu wa
 Meido no tabi no
 Ichi ri-zuka:
 Medetaku mo ari
 Medetaku mo nashi."

"At every door
 The pine-trees stand;
 One mile-post more
 To the spirit-land;
 And as there's gladness,
 So there's sadness."