

THE JAPANESE FLORAL CALENDAR.

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IV. THE CHERRY.

THIS is the prince of flowers in Japan.

"Hana wa sakura;

Hito wa bushi."

"The flower [is] the cherry;

The man [is] the knight."

Just as the *bushi*, or *samurai* (knight), was the *beau ideal* among Japanese men, i. e., the "gentleman" of the nation; so the cherry, with its spotless blossoms, "symbolizing that delicacy of sentiment and blamelessness of life belonging to high courtesy and true knightliness," is the Chevalier Bayard of Japanese flowers.

The wild cherry is said to have existed in Japan from time immemorial; and from this "have been developed countless varieties, culminating in that which bears the pink-tinged double [*yae-sakura*] blossoms as large as a hundred-leaved rose, covering every branch and twig with thick rosettes. A faint fragrance arises from these sheets of bloom." (Scidmore's *Jinrikisha Days in Japan*.)

The pale pink is the only one that takes first rank among cherry blossoms. "When, in spring, the trees flower, it is as though fleeciest masses of clouds faintly tinged by sunset had floated down from the highest sky to fold themselves about the branches. * * * The reader who has never seen a cherry-tree blossoming in Japan cannot possibly imagine the delight of the spectacle. There are no green leaves; these come later: there is only one glorious burst of blossoms, veiling every twig and bough in their delicate mist; and the soil beneath each tree is covered deep out of sight by fallen petals as by a drift of pink snow." (Hearn's *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan*.)

It is also to Prof. Hearn that we are indebted for the following: "About this mountain cherry [*yamazakura*] there is a humorous saying that illustrates the Japanese love of puns. In order fully to appreciate it, the reader should know that Japanese nouns have no distinction of singular and plural. The word *ha*, as pronounced, may signify either 'leaves' or 'teeth'; and the word *hana*, either 'flowers' or 'nose.' The *yamazakura* puts forth its *ha* (leaves) before its *hana* (flowers). Wherefore, a man whose *ha* (teeth) project in advance of his *hana* (nose) is called a *yamazakura*. Prog-



BLOOMING CHERRY TREES ON SUMIDA BANK.

(After a photograph.)

nathism is not uncommon in Japan, especially among the lower classes."

The cherry blossom is symbolic of loyalty and patriotism, and is generally associated with the pheasant.

No important locality in Japan is without its special park or grove with cherry trees, to which the people resort in immense crowds at the proper season. The inhabitants of Tokyo, for instance, flock to Ueno Park, or Mukojima, or Koganei, or Asukayama; while the Kyoto people visit Arashi-yama. But a more than local reputation attaches to Yoshino in the province of Yamato:

there "a thousand trees line the patch and cover the hillside." And some poet has said: "The cherry blossoms on Mount Yoshino deceive me into thinking they are snow." But Yoshino's fame is disputed by other places: Asukayama, near Tokyo, is called the "new Yoshino;" and an Imperial poet has said that "not second to Yo-



VIEWING THE CHERRY BLOSSOMS AT UENO PARK, TOKYO.

shino is Arashiyama, where the white spray of the torrent sprinkles the cherry blossoms."

It is unfortunate that cherry-viewing is marred by dissipation, and that its "carnival rivals the Saturnalia of the ancients." It is almost dangerous, for instance, to visit Mukojima on account of

therude and boisterous conduct of those who have been freely imbibing *sake*, beer or whiskey. The following story (Conder's *Floral Art of Japan*) tells the origin of the connection between *sake* and *sakura*: [The Emperor Richiu] was disporting himself with his courtiers in a pleasure-boat, on a lake of the Royal Park, when some petals from the wild cherry trees of the adjoining hills fluttered into the wine-cup from which he was drinking. This circumstance is said to have drawn His Majesty's notice to the beauty of this neglected blossom, and from this time arose the custom of wine-drinking at the time of cherry-viewing. To the present day there is a popular saying: "Without wine, who can properly enjoy the sight of the cherry blossom?"

"No man so callous but he heaves a sigh
 When o'er his head the withered cherry-flowers
 Come fluttering down. Who knows? The spring's soft showers
 May be but tears shed by the sorrowing sky."—Chamberlain.

The Koganei cherry trees, which, for two miles and a half, line both sides of the aqueduct conveying water into Tokyo, are said to have numbered originally ten thousand, but there are now only a few hundred. They were planted there with the idea that they had "the virtue of keeping off impurities from the water."

Night cherry flowers [*yozakura*], "seen by the pale light of the moon," are a great attraction, one of the special sights of the year.

It may readily be understood that so popular a blossom as this would figure largely in Japanese literature. The famous "Hundred Poems" contain five on that subject; and several are included in the *Manyōshū*. But we have room for only two, of which the first is remarkable for its brevity, and the second is Motoōri's famous one, dear to all Japanese:—

1. "A cloud of flowers!
 Is the bell Uyeno
 Or Asakusa?"

Or, expanded, "The cherry-flowers in Mukojima are blossoming in such profusion as to form a cloud which shuts out the prospect. Whether the bell which is sounding from the distance is that of the temple of Uyeno or of Asakusa, I am unable to determine." (Aston's *History of Japanese Literature*.)

2. "*Shikishima no*
Yamato-gokoro wo
Uto towaba
Yama-zakura-bana:"

"Isles of blest Japan!
Should your Yamato spirit
Strangers seek to scan,
Say—scenting morn's sunlit air
Blows the cherry wild and fair!"
—Nitobe's *Soul of Japan*.

(Or) "If one should ask you concerning the heart of a true Japanese, point to the wild cherry flower glowing in the sun."