

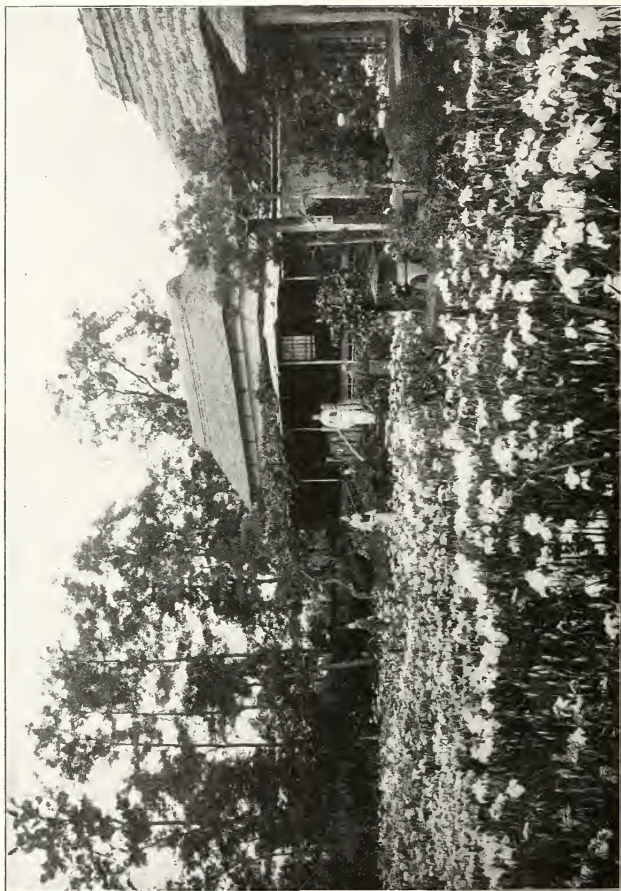
JAPAN HONORS HER WARRIORS OF THE FUTURE

BY ARTHÉMISE GOERTZ

THE JAPANESE have a proverb, "Among flowers, the cherry; among men, the warrior." It is typical of the Japanese temperament—strange admixture of gentleness and austerity—that flowers and war should be mentioned in the same breath, a phrase not so paradoxical, however, when it is understood that war connotes for the Japanese not the searing hatred among men associated with belligerency by occidental nations, but signifies rather the superior virtue of bravery, which has always been the ultimate ideal of the Japanese policy. What beauty meant to the Greeks, right to the Romans, and purity to the Hebrews of old, bravery has meant to Japan. In the middle ages, the development of courage was undertaken with deliberate system; in the schools of the Tokugawa period, even as today, martial exercises were a part of the daily curriculum; for centuries even the festivals of the Flowery Kingdom have borne beneath their surface ripples of laughter, life, and gaiety, a deep undercurrent of this inflexible moral force.

On May 5th of every year since Tokimune Hojo's victory over the invading hordes of Kubla Khan on that date in 1282, Japan has bristled with ancient weapons and flamed with banners and flags from one end to the other of her island domain; for on "the fifth day of the fifth month" is observed the *Tango-no-sekku*, or Boys' Festival, as dear and thrilling to the heart of the Japanese lad as is the Fourth of July to an American youngster. While every Japanese schoolboy envies his *ni-san* (elder brother) fighting on the other side of the Japan Sea, many a Japanese soldier this year will dream in Manchurian trenches of the brave festival "back home" which has done so much towards fortifying him with courage sufficient to face the terror and hardship of war.

For days preceding the great occasion, there is an unwonted bustle among all members of the erstwhile calmly regulated Japanese household. Behind fragile walls of rice-paper and bamboo, maids and mothers prepare the chamber of honor to receive the precious relics which the men of the family fetch from the fireproof warehouse, or *kura*, which squats like a whitewashed dwarf to the



IRIS AT HORI KIRI, TOKYO.

rear of the house, in the garden. Inside, a wide, flat, black-lacquered stand is set up in the *tokonoma*, a slight recess in the wall of the room; the *tokonoma*, hardly more than a symbol, is all that is left today of the guest-chamber of olden times, which in every Japanese house, whether of peasant or noble, was always kept in immaculate readiness against an impromptu visit of the Emperor. No more fitting corner than this could be chosen for the reception of the priceless heirlooms which are brought forth but once a year, to grace and solemnize the occasion of the Boys' Festival.

An ancient coat-of-mail, not unlikely the very one which was worn by the boy's *samurai* ancestor, and handed down from generation to generation, makes an imposing centerpiece for the display. About it are grouped bows and arrows, lances, spears, helmets, drums, flags, targets, sabres, saddles and armor, and in fact every conceivable military appurtenance of bygone ages. An appropriate background for so martial an array, a silken banner, embroidered with the fierce figure of Hachiman, God of War, hangs against the rear wall. The black lacquered stand is burdened with a host of historical dolls—Hideyoshi, the Napoleon of Japan; Nogi Kiten, hero of Port Arthur; Yoshitsune, the Bayard of Japan; Iyeyasu, founder of Yedo (now Tokyo) and the brilliant dynasty of the Tokugawa; even a woman, the Empress Jingu, the Japanese Boadicia—and a score of others, all correctly attired in the military dress of the periods to which they belong. The floor in front of the *tokonoma* swarms with a proud company of miniature warriors, some on gaily caparisoned horses, some with arrows poised in their ancient bows, others with drawn swords and diminutive sabres. On lacquered tables flanking the display, the most noble of family treasures, the ancestral swords, rest on cloths of scarlet shot with threads of gold.

Meanwhile, from the appearance of the streets, especially in the rural districts, it seems that the world has turned over on its side and shifted the ocean above the horsetops, for the air is filled with giant paper carp that swim to and fro with the spring winds as happily as their own substantial brothers in their own element. Tall bamboo poles are erected before every house which boasts one or more boys in the family circle, and from the tops of the poles are suspended these toy fish—one for each boy in the house, and varying in size according to the ages of the children. Over a house which

is blest with many sons there floats a veritable school of these carp; the largest, at the top of the pole, is very often nearly twelve feet in length. Hoops of bamboo in the mouth and tail of the fish allow the air to pass through, inflating the body to life-like proportions. The untutored eye of the occidental sees only the tinselled scales and vividly colored fins glancing brightly in the sunlight, but to the Japanese youth the carp banner is much more than an ephemeral toy; it represents the stern and inevitable doctrine of invincible courage, for the carp is the bravest of fish, swimming upstream despite the current, mounting waterfalls, and attaining a great age. By the presence of the paper carp-banners, the Japanese boy is reminded that to his Emperor he owes a debt of courage, and is expected to brave inimical forces and overcome every obstacle that stands in the way of progress for Dai Nippon.

The decorations and effects used in the Boys' Festival are so stern and warlike that it seems inconsistent for the holiday to be known also by the name of a frail and delicate thing like the iris. To the Japanese mind, however, the iris, growing deeply rooted in the soil, signifies perseverance and endurance, and the day is popularly called *Shobu-no-sekku* (Iris Festival) throughout Japan. When the Mongolian armies threatened the western shores of the country in the thirteenth century, the Mikado sent his son, Prince Sagara, to stem the tide of invasion. The Prince stopped at a shrine in Yamato province on his way to war, and, as he prayed for victory, he observed in the garden of the fane beds of exquisite iris in bloom. This was on the fifth of May. The following July, the Mongolian armada was almost utterly destroyed off the coast of Hakata, near Moji, by raging storms, which the Prince considered an answer to his prayers. To this incident is attributed the origin of the festival, with its attendant use of the iris, or "sweet-flag," though there are Japanese scholars who claim that the popularity of the iris is to be traced to the superstitious practice, in feudal times, of applying iris leaves to injured parts of the body in the hope of effecting a speedy cure.

The iris flowers and their sword-like leaves are gathered from the banks of river and lake, and carried home by the basketful. The leaves are hung from the eaves of the house in rows which look to the occidental like green icicles, but the Japanese eye sees them as a hedge of swords, beyond which no evil may pass on this day

of days to afflict the lads who live within. Bunches of iris leaves are arranged in vases around the display in the *tokonoma*, and in various places throughout the house, so that practically every corner is an ambushade of bristling bayonets. The iris flower itself is used for its supposedly salubrious effects. In the country districts, the Japanese boy begins the *Tango-no-sekku* by getting up early in the morning and bathing in water which has been saturated with iris flowers—the scent of the iris lending a fragrance to the bath delightful enough to suit the pleasure of Hollywood's most fastidious idol. At noon, a feast of iris is everywhere the order of the day, and even in sophisticated Tokyo, where so many of the old customs are fading into tradition, the *Tango-no-sekku* midday meal of *chimaki*, rice dumpling wrapped in iris leaves, and *shobu-saké*, fermented rice-water in which chopped up iris leaves have been soaked, is still enjoyed.

The street games played in the afternoon of the Boys' Festival borrow a military aspect from the warlike display indoors. Kite-flying on this occasion becomes more than ever a test of skill and dexterity. A favorite stunt is to paint two kites with the faces of rival warriors, and cause them to duel in mid-air. A tense splinter of whalebone, set in at the top of the frame, utters blood-curdling howls as it vibrates in the wind, while the cords which tether the two duelists are stuccoed for several feet of their topmost length with powdered glass, so that they saw up and down against each other until one or the other kite falls to the ground to become the captive of the victor.

Processions of boys and decorated floats ramble through the streets during the afternoon, and music, laughter, shouting, prancing about, and the constant throb of the drum make the scene as merry as the most festive European or American carnival. But the big event of the day is the mimic battle which ushers in the dusk. The boys form into two sides—called "Genji" and "Heike," old rival feudal clans which figured so prominently in the Minamoto and Taira Wars, the Japanese Wars of the Roses. The "Genji" carry white flags, the "Heike" red. All the boys wear a kind of earthenware helmet, and are armed with heavy bamboo swords. The lines march in battle array to the scene of the conflict: they meet, and the attack begins. The boys, many of whom are already adept in the art of fencing, rush to the combat and hack at each other with

their bamboo swords. Relatives and friends, even snowy-haired grandfathers, cheer their champions from the sidelines. A skilful blow shatters the helmet of an opponent, who must then drop out of the struggle. That side is victorious which breaks the most helmets, or captures the most flags from the opposing company.

Nightfall brings a climax to the day's events in a great pyrotechnical display to which the entire community looks forward. Even after the younger boys have been tucked in their night-kimonos under their *futons*, tired to the point of exhaustion but beatifically happy, the older lads, reluctant to say farewell to the fun, parade through the streets, singing and swaying colored lanterns and flaming torches.

To understand the *Tango-no-sekku* is to look upon the soul of Japan. The ceremony of decorating the *tokonoma* with relics of dead ages, teaching the boys the virtues of their forebears by the insinuating presence of ancestral armor and swords, and telling historical tales that will fortify their impressionable young hearts against trials to come, shows how closely the inseparable trinity of past, present, and future is linked together in the Japanese mind. Every phase of the Japanese polity since the time of honored Jimmu Tenno, the first Emperor, to the present day, is featured, though not always obvious to casual eyes. At a time when Japan is perhaps holding the balance of power in the Far East in the hollow of her hand, it is a relief to discover in this simple festival upon what a firm and admirable foundation rests the moral and ethical education of Japanese youth.

No other secular observance is so heavily imbued with the chivalrous principles of *Bushido*, (literally "knight ways," or, as we might interpret it, "Precepts of Knighthood"), which is the Japanese ethical code. From the moral standards of the *samurai*, whose diminutive counterparts the Japanese boy admires among his warrior dolls, this system of ethics has been evolved, embracing diligence in military arts, loyalty and patriotism, bravery, self-mastery, alertness, trustfulness and justice. In short, it is a collection of the precepts which the fighting nobles of old observed in their daily life, as well as in their vocation as warriors, an organic growth of decades and centuries of military career. *Bushido* has one point in its teaching for which no sacrifice is held too dear, no life too precious; this is the duty of loyalty, which was as the keystone of the arch of feudal

virtues. The feudal system has passed away from Japan as it has from England, and yet there is no less reverence to the duty of loyalty in Japan today than long ago, *Bushido* holds that the interests of the family and its members are one and the same, and that it should be so with the entire nation. There are no interests separately for subject or ruler: all should work for the whole, and merge his or her personal interests in the interests of the nation in its entirety.

The Japanese lad sits before the *tokonoma*, so like an altar heaped with idols, and listens spellbound to his father pronouncing these ancient precepts in terms of stories as thrilling as any modern adventure yarn would be to an American boy. There are tales of Kusunoki Masashige, one of Go-daigo's generals, and paragon of Japanese patriotism, who prayed for seven lives that he might give them all to his master, and of those popular heroes, the Forty-seven Ronin, vengeance-wreaking followers of the wronged Lord Asano, all of whom committed *seppuku*, or *hara-kiri*, as it was variously called some two hundred and fifteen years ago, all at the same morning hour, all by gracious permission of the law as the alternative to death at the executioner's hands. The stories are many, but the theme is always the same: unswerving devotion to superiors, which renders it the greatest possible honor to die in the service of the Emperor. It is not surprising that teaching of this sort should result in a unified organism of government, based upon an ever centralizing loyalty, which gives Japan a power out of all proportion to mere size.

The influence of *Bushido* on the Japanese nation cannot well be overestimated, but the *Tango-no-sekku* portrays another influence still more far-reaching and fundamental. This is ancestor-worship, which may be regarded as the foundation stone of loyalty and patriotism, and which supplies that enormous reserve of energy which makes Japan what she is today. The reverence with which the boys are trained to regard even the relics of their illustrious forebears results practically in the deification of the departed. The effect upon the living of their duties to the dead and to future generations is enormous. All through his life, the Japanese boy has the responsibility not only of living up to the reputation of his ancestors, but of being a good ancestor in turn. Below the intense practical working of the Japanese mind, its wholly material grasp on material

things, its swift assimilation of modern science in its essence as well as in its detail, the ancient beliefs still cling in some corner of their mental fabric, and their filial devotion, carefully nourished by their elders from childhood to manhood, has yet to be broken.

Despite the outwardly martial aspects of the *Tango-no-sekku*, its purpose is by no means to inspire a love of war in the heart of the Japanese adolescent. Its teachings are wholly *Bushido* in the sense of training the potential warriors of Japan to protect their homeland against hostile forces, rather than in the line of aggressive conflict in terms of which occidental nations translate militarism. The precarious geographic position of the Island Empire demands that she be eternally on the defensive, and this is essentially the meaning of the Japanese word for war. The composite character *bu*, which stands for "war," is composed of two individual characters, *shi*, to stop, and *kwa*, a spear, the joint meaning of which is to prevent the movement of *kan*, shields, and *kwa*, spears (or, in plain English, "prevent war"). To employ troops for the purpose of fighting, to defeat armies, to besiege castles, to capture territory, and so forth, is not the true Japanese art of war. The true art of war is to govern one's country and territorial possessions carefully, to keep them from invasion by neighboring foes, to send troops to put down what revolts there may be in adjoining countries, to show the adjacent nations the light of one's fearfulness in war, so as to prevent hostile incursions, and to awake fear in the hearts of men.

And so, amid an atmosphere of poetry and world-old militarism, hedged in by ceremonial and enlivened by festive jollity, taught strange duties compounded of austerity and gentleness, self-immolation and individual development, the young master of the East journeys on his way to full-orbed manhood. The treasures enjoyed for so brief a time on the day of the *Tango-no-sekku* are all returned the morning after to the gloomy precincts of the *kura*, not to see light again for another year; but the lessons they leave, sown like seed in the mind of the Japanese boy, grow into the mature virtues of bravery, filial devotion, and patriotism, insuring for Japan, in her warriors of the future, the ideal type of military protection.