

January.



THE very name of the month suggests the intensity of cold. Winter has established its reign; the sharp frosts have penetrated to the depths of the earth; every stream is locked; every flower is buried; every bird's song is hushed; and in the bare forest the woodpeckers and nut-hatches still linger, we hear only a short, quick call, which, repeated at short intervals, sounds like the tones of a dialogue, but there is no singing. In sheltered places and near the farm-houses, we often may see a solitary robin, or a company of chickadees, helping themselves to the supplies provided for the fowls, or flying merrily about the kitchen door in search of a few crumbs. With the snow which, if it falls at all, is usually most abundant at this season, comes a troop of snow-birds, with their graceful wheeling flight, swinging upon the swirling drifts of the storm, as though it were a delight to them to be a part of it.

It is worth while for any one living in the country, and loving snow-birds, to plant a few sunflowers in the fence corners, to afford them a feast in the deep snow when everything is covered and beyond their reach. The tall plant holds up its sturdy head against the northern blasts, and its rich oily seeds are a great favorite with all winter birds. I have seen a cluster of these weather-beaten stalks covered with a whole flock of the plump little creatures, in all kinds of attitudes, chattering with delight at their rich "find." In the city, the sparrows are the object of unlimited charity, and in the morning, after a heavy snow fall, one cannot go many steps without seeing comfortable breakfast parties within the area rails, enjoying a bountiful meal spread for them upon the white cover nature has provided. It would be well if the poor could be fed as bountifully and with as little trouble, but mid-winter brings out in sharp relief the dramatic contrasts between poverty and wealth; and, while the rich are preparing their gayest entertainments and engaging in a round of pleasure, the poor are shrinking into the shadow of the season, appalled at the double conflict with cold and hunger. It is now that the gentle charities shine most brightly, and ministry of Christian love is most active.

In the great city there is enough to do, for want sits by many a cold hearthstone, and children wander helpless and homeless in the chill streets. If society rests content with its gay life of dissipation, and lets the winters come and go, without putting out its hand to help, save to bestow a thoughtless alms, darker scenes will come, and beggary—the beggary of Italy, and all the old civilizations—will disfigure our shores, and combining with ignorance and vice, form a league, which will threaten the moral health of the nation. The remedy must come from a wiser and better considered system of relief, and men must learn the lesson that the hard season teaches to all that will learn, that only in ceaseless in-

dustry and wise forethought, is there defense against want and misery.

The New Year; what heart does not thrill with some dawning hope at the sound of the New Year's bells? Life is a great mystery, and in its obscure future lies the secret of its supreme interest, its ceaseless charm. Every year brings its disappointments, and lays low many a cherished idol; but we look forward still to the unknown hieroglyph on the scroll of the future with unfaltering gaze, and fresh anticipations of delight.

The cry of the heart is for life, life, life,—and every year presents a fresh draft to the thirsting lips, and we are sure, that if to many it be bitter, it is always true, that to many more it will be sweet. It lies with us all to make the sum of wretchedness ever less, and the sum of human happiness constantly increasing.

The year that is past has been one of national trial and national calamity, and never before in the history of our country have we so rejoiced to welcome the frost, and looked forward to the advent of winter as to the signal of deliverance. Among our stricken ones, the year opens amid lingering shadows; many homes are desolate, many hearts are broken, but the pestilence is stayed, and the Destroyer is laid low.

Slowly but surely light and joy shall return, and that which has been shall be again, and our own dear land, once distracted and torn by the fury of war, shall be bound in indissoluble union by the ministry of suffering.

Let us welcome the New Year with thankfulness, and look to the splendid possibilities that lie before, with hope that they shall be more than fulfilled in the coming years, crowned with abundance, prosperity, and peace.

The New Year.

BY MARIE MERRICK.

AS from the Old Year's grave we turn away,
With sad reluctant feet,
A somber form, all clad in misty gray,
Our yearning gaze doth meet:

LIKE some gray nun just from the cloister's pale,
We see it standing there;
Fain would our glances pierce beneath the veil,
To know if she be fair.

FROM Time's vast cloister cometh this one now,
Unto the world that waits,
The multitudes, that longing, hungering, bow
Without the Heavenly Gates.

AND she will stand amid the waiting throng,
Dealing to each his dole,
Until the shadows of her day grow long,
And cruelly, fiercely roll

DECEMBER'S winds through leafless, shivering trees,
While cloud-looms swiftly weave
Snow-garments, the poor, naked earth to please,
Her bareness to relieve.

AND then, when dying we shall see this year,
And view unveiled her face,
Will there be one who need not shed a tear,
O'er scars he would efface?

UNSIGHTLY scars which he, himself, hath wrought
With evil's chisel keen;
Scars which shall cause to rise the bitter thought
Of all that might have been,

WHICH would upon the dead year's brow have cast
A glow of peace serene;
That peace which oft—as knowing sorrow past—
Is on dead faces seen.

ALAS! the lesson comes so oft too late,
That we who have a share,
Each one, in carving out his earthly fate,
Might make our years all fair.

New Year in Japan.

BY LYDIA M. MILLARD.



HERE are a great many beautiful things to be seen in our store windows during the holidays, but I should like very much to walk with some of my young friends through the streets of Japan, on the 6th of February, the day before their New-Year, which comes a little later than ours. Everything is being cleaned up and brightened, from the slate-colored tiles of the low roofs, and the gallery in the upper story looking out upon the street, to the matting covering the lower floor. The mats are made white as snow, with rice powder. The beautiful screens between the walls of the rooms are taken down, and all the beautiful birds, trees, and flowers, painted on their gold ground, are brightened and look like new. If you walk near the bridge of Niphon, the heart of the city, you'll see the sidewalks almost covered with matting, screens, bronze, and porcelain, which are to be cleaned and put back in their places again. In the houses of the rich, you'll see coolies or porters putting everything in order. They are full of fun, tumbling down stairs, stumbling over footstools, or tossing one of their lazy companions up in a blanket.

Over some of the doors, you'll see pine or bamboo trees, bound together at the top with rice-straw garlands, and adorned with oranges and gilded paper: Long straw bands, inwoven with fir branches and ferns, ornament the roofs, and walls, and balconies. The temples and fountains and ships are adorned in the same way with firs and ferns. The streets are crowded with country and city people. The peasant's horses are almost weighed down with bamboo and fir twigs. Everybody carries an umbrella, and the men and women carry their baggage on the back of their neck, wrapped in oil paper. Your ears are almost deafened with the noise of little trumpets, tambourines, and whistles, little flageolets and Dan's pipes. Every storekeeper wants to sell as many as he can; so he whistles and blows his trumpets, and strikes his tambourines, and makes all the little bells jingle as long and as hard as he can. The children try them too, and tease their mothers to buy some of the curious little bears and monkeys,

turtles and buffaloes, made of painted and varnished plaited straw. The little turtles look just like live turtles, dragging behind them the tufts of sea-herbs growing on their shells. The Japanese fathers buy many curious masks and fans, to take home to the children.

You'll see men in blue cotton jackets and trousers under their kirimons or dressing gowns, and if the day is muddy, with pattens or shoes made of three pieces of wood, walking along with ever so many little red lanterns tied to long sticks lifted high in the air above their heads, and near them four priests dancing along under a crape canopy. In this curious crowd will be a very funny-looking fellow, going along and dancing and leaping, with a dragon's head on his shoulder, and a band of music behind him. He is an agent of the journeyman masons, and this is the way he takes to get funds for their society. The cooks and porters and valets have on high green paper hats, shaped like a sugar loaf, and under these you'll see masks of bird beaks, almost hiding their faces. They are dressed in different colored garments, and their high green hats shake as they go along from house to house, singing and dancing, and getting money for a festival they want to have.

It is a rule in Japan that, by the last day of the year, all bills must be paid, and no one must begin the year in debt. (This is a very good rule.) But they have another rule, and a very beautiful one too: that there must be flowers in every house on New-Year's Day.

The Japanese raise a great many little dwarf trees by giving them only a little soil, water, and light, and you'll see little dwarf peach trees covered with double flowers, and little live bamboos and cedars, looking as if they came from fairy land. The children have little paper trees, covered with flowers planted in little wooden urns, covered with glazed paper, and they look just like their mother's little live trees in the porcelain urns, while the children are putting these little trees all in a handsome row where they can be best seen. Some of the men are going through the streets with big pestles on their shoulders, and rolling great mortars, like barrels, before them. There are rice pounders, going from house to house to turn the rice grains into flour, and to knead the flour; for all the people on New-Year's Day must have their shelves filled with bread and rice-cakes for their workmen and servants, and for gifts to friends and neighbors. The bakeries are filled with men "kneading the flour, feeding the ovens, and taking out the loaves." You'll see hundreds of coolies, or porters, carrying big barrels of saki, or rice beer, wrapped in matting and hung from bamboo poles. At the street corners, buckets and barrels of this rice beer are piled up, waiting to be carried to the people's houses.

The policemen scold away at the noisy crowd, and shake their heads and hands at them, and when they can't keep them still in that way, they rush at the nearest coolies and loafers and hit their heads with their fans. The women and children look out of their windows and laugh at the noisy crowd.

The journeyman brewers have a great time on this day. They are paid early in the morning, and they celebrate the day in the gardens

around the city. They have a feast of lobsters and fresh cakes, and they drink each other's health in great bowls of saki. Some lie underneath the trees, and some dance. In the evening they march back to the city, dressed up to imitate the daimios or princes.

The brewer that marches at the head they call the herald-at-arms. He has on his head an osier or willow chicken coop for a helmet, in his right hand, a dipper of saki. He calls out in a great hollow voice, as he marches along, "Staniero," which means "prostrate yourself." Then comes the prince brewer, a fat jolly man, his arrows supported by two other brewers, carrying a long wooden saber in their girdle, and wearing queer-looking paper miters or pointed caps on their heads. The people in Japan tell you that a sacred family of Gods invented their saki, that the "god, the goddess of saki, and their eight sons haunt the shores of the ocean wearing a girdle of oak leaves, with their long red hair hanging on their hips: that they are sometimes seen at sunset, on the yellow sand, flourishing their bowls and dippers, and dancing around an enormous jar of saki. When evening comes, the bay of Yedo, and the sky reflect the red light of millions of lanterns, and here and there, in his lonely room, a teacher sits, writing the poems he must send in on New Year's morning, to the parents of his scholars. He has before him a dish of rice cakes, and a vase of flowers, offerings to the sun. These, he thinks, help him to write better verses. He is writing them on red paper, but he will rise very early, and copy them on the fans, which he is to give to his patrons. At midnight on New Year's eve, small fires are kindled on the floors of the houses. They burn brightly a few minutes and then are put out. They are made of bunches of twigs—they sprinkle them with holy water—and from the shape of the flame, or the way in which it burns or crackles, they judge of their good or bad fortune, the coming year. By this charm, they think they predict the future events of the year.

In the sacred enclosures of the temples the servants kindle great bonfires to purify the temples, and the priests in their robes march out of the temple door in long processions. They say that when they get at the top of the stairs, they meet two frightful demons, armed with pitchforks, which try to drive them back, but they sprinkle their holy water, and the monsters quickly retreat. At midnight, while the little children are fast asleep on their wooden pillows, the father, dressed in his richest clothes, with a saber in his girdle, goes alone all through the house, with a box of roasted beans in his left hand, on a tray. He is going, he thinks, to drive the evil spirits out of the house. With his right hand he scatters the beans here and there, saying in a loud voice some mysterious prayers, ending every few words with "Avaunt Demons!" or "Begone Devils!" "Fortune enter!"

When he thinks the devils all gone he goes to bed, but early in the morning the family are up making presents to each other. The mother's hair is nicely brushed away from the temples, and gathered up in a small smooth puff at the back of her head, and tied with gold, silver, and scarlet cord, fastened with

gilt and vermilion pins. She puts the present she is to make her husband on the matting before him, and bows down to the floor three times. She rises to her knees, and bends forward, offering him her good wishes.

He squats down before her with his arms hanging down, bends his head forward to listen to her, shows he is pleased in a few low words, or a subdued whistling—then he gives her his good wishes and presents. Then come children and grandparents to exchange their gifts. People in Japan make New Year's visits, and some send their cards in elegant envelopes, bound by a knot of ribbons, carried by porters through the streets on elegant yellow or orange or red varnished plates. Over the doors of the princes' palaces and public buildings are triumphal arches of pine and bamboo garlands bound with rice straw. In the middle of this arch you'll see a rice cake, an orange, or a lobster, with wreaths of fern around them; these are tributes to the best grain, the best fruit and the best fish. All through the streets sounds a strange music, like the mingled tones of many Æolian harps. This comes from ever so many paper kites all over the city, some only six inches square, some most as large as a house. These fill the air. There are kites like cranes and parrots, and eagles and swans, some shaped like heads of warriors, and some like beautiful ladies. A strip of bamboo stretched across the frame makes the musical sound. Sometimes they fit a kind of Æolian apparatus to them, very small, but it will imitate the song of birds or the voices of men. When the air is full of these kites there is a great noise. The boys try to cut each other's kite strings, and if a girl can bring a boy's kite to the ground, they all clap their hands, and laugh.

The middle of the streets are filled with children playing, and little boys passing their hoops or tops to their big brothers or fathers. The boys think their cylinder-shaped tops spin the best of all.

Some of the children have papier mache birds on weeping-willow twigs, some beautiful dolls dressed like a Japanese gentleman, walking under an umbrella, and another doll beside him for his wife with the head of a fox. Some of the children hang around themselves bright trappings, and mount on their brother's back, while the father gallops before them, with a pasteboard horse and false rider's legs, blowing a trumpet. In the public squares, the children are looking at the drilled monkeys, wise rabbits, and industrious mice. The mouse-trainer puts six little mice into a lattice work enclosure, where they pound rice with their little pestles; then he takes the wisest little mouse of all and hides him in the folds of his dressing-gown. He turns to a table with a little temple on the top and a long staircase leading to it. He puts a box before the altar, and in the box a piece of money. The mouse comes forth, goes down his master's arm to the table, goes up the stairs to the temple, opens the box, takes in his teeth the piece of money, and lays it in his master's hand.

They have many things to please the children in Japan. I should like to go there very much; they do so much to make children happy.