



JAPANESE MOTHER AND CHILD.

JAPANESE WOMEN.

BY PIERRE LOTI.

I THOUGHT that I had drawn the final pen stroke on all subjects connected with Japan, and here I have allowed myself to promise an article on that mysterious little cabinet curiosity, the Japanese woman. I have therefore surrounded myself once more with all that could vivify, even unto the illusion of presence, my still recent memories of yonder: dresses impregnated with Nippon perfumes, vases, fans, images, and portraits. Portraits especially, innumerable portraits, spread out upon my writing-table; laughing faces of *mousmis*, known or unknown; little eyes drawn to the temples—little eyes as of cats. And toilets and poses! All these archnesses, all these studied and bizarre graces draped in the folds of the long tunics or sheltered beneath the extravagant *bariolage* of the parasols. And the desired illusion is such that a murmur of little voices seems to emanate from those open albums; around me I hear, in the silence, like a sound of gentle laughter.

I do not think that any European, if he wishes to go beyond surfaces and aspects, can write with absolute justice about Japanese women. A Japanese alone could do it; or perhaps, strictly, a Chinaman, for there are incontestable soul affinities between nations yet so different. Moreover, if this study were a little too elaborated, it would become incomprehensible; it would teach us nothing, for certain points would escape us which would be precisely its cardinal points. The yellow race and ours are the two poles of the human species. There are extreme divergences even in our ways of perceiving exterior objects, and our notions on essential matters are often the reverse of theirs. We can never completely penetrate into a Japanese or Chinese intelligence. At a certain moment, with mysterious dread, we feel ourselves arrested by insuperable cerebral barriers.

I will therefore remain very superficial in what I have to say, and I think

it better to confess frankly from the outset that I could not be otherwise.

Very ugly, those poor little Japanese women! I prefer to make this brutal statement at once, to attenuate it later with mincing prettiness, graceful drollery, adorable little hands, and then rice powder, rose and gold on the lips, all manner of artifices.

Hardly any eyes at all, so little as to be almost nothing: two narrow slits, oblique and diverging, where roll wily or cajoling eyeballs, as between the barely opened lids of those cats whom the glare of daylight makes weary.

Above those little updrawn eyes—but very far above, very highly perched—are outlined the eyebrows, as fine as pencil marks, and not at all oblique, not at all parallel with the eyes that they accompany so badly; but straight on the same line, contrary to what it has been the custom to represent in our European pictures whenever the artist has had to portray a Japanese woman.

I believe that the particular strangeness of those little faces of women is entirely due to that disposition of the eye, which is general, and also to the development of the cheek, which is always swollen to roundness like a doll's; moreover, in their pictures, the artists of the country never fail to reproduce, exaggerating them even to improbability, those characteristic signs of their race.

The other features are much more changeable, varying with individuals first, and especially with social conditions. Among the common people the lips remain thick, the nose flat and short; among the nobility the mouth becomes thinner, the nose longer and finer, sometimes even curves in the shape of a slender eagle's beak.

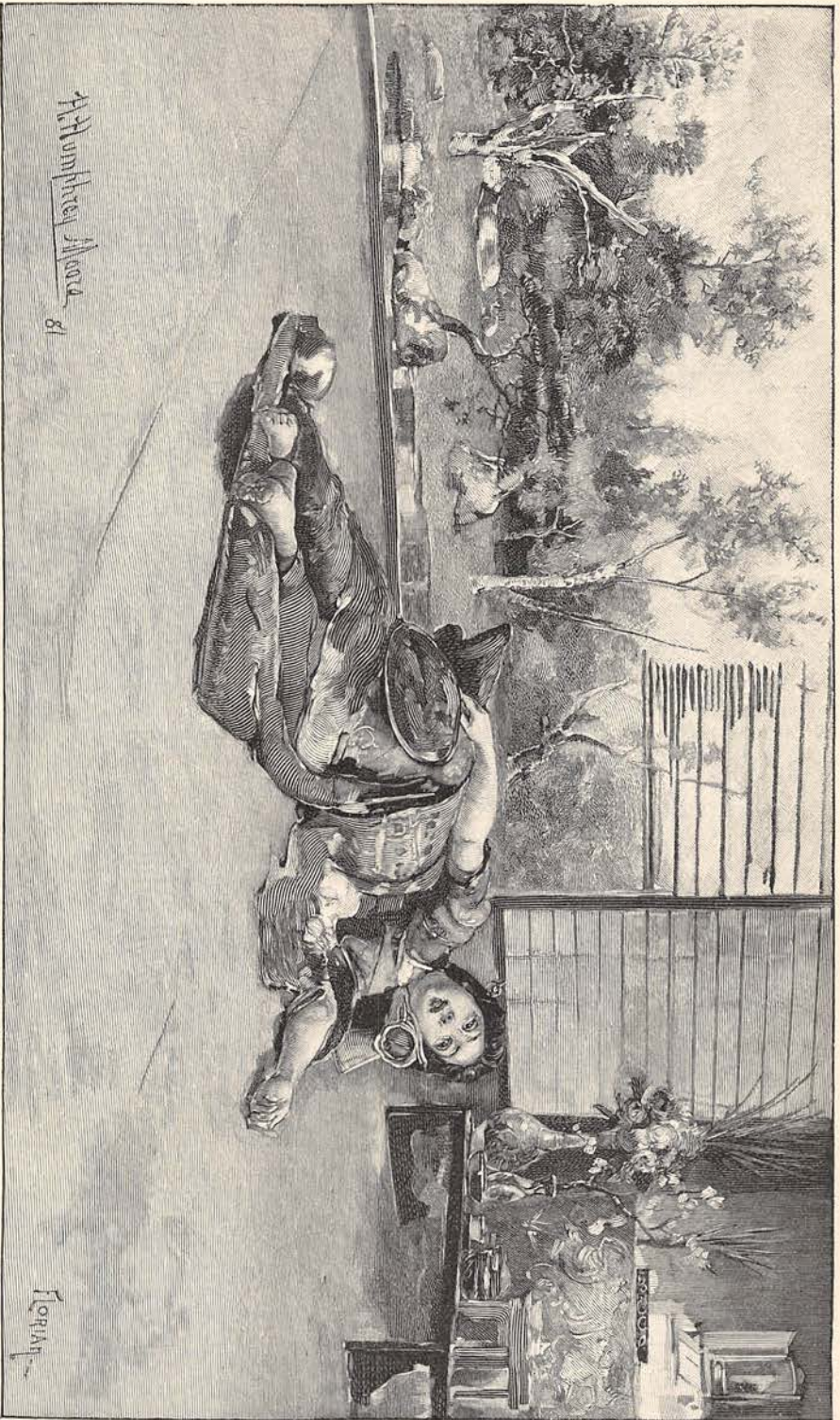
There is no country where the feminine types are so clearly defined between different castes. Brown peasant women, bronzed like Indians, well balanced on their slim waists, plump and muscled beneath their everlasting dresses of blue cottonade; etiolated women of the cities, real diminutives of women, white and wan like sickly Europeans, with I know not what of hollowed, of undermined, beneath the flesh, which is the sign of races that are too old—all these working-women of the great cities seem to have been worn out, hereditarily worn out before

birth, by too long a continuity of labor and of tension of mind over minute trifles; it seems as though upon their frail forms weighed all the weariness of having constantly produced since centuries those millions of baubles, those innumerable little works of exhausting patience, of which Japan is full. And among the princesses the refining influence of aristocracy, so far back does it date, has finished by fashioning extraordinary little artificial persons, with childish hands and busts, whose painted faces, whiter and pinker than a fresh bonbon, indicate no age; their smile is far away, like that of ancient idols; their updrawn eyes have an expression of both youth and death.

At excessive heights above all Japanese women, the invisible Empress, till within recent years, was enthroned like a goddess. But she, the sovereign, has descended little by little from her empyrean; she shows herself at present, she receives, she speaks, and she even lunches—with the tips of her lips, it is true. She has abandoned her magnificent *camails* strewn with strange blazons, her wide head-dress that looked like an idol's, and her enormous fans; she sends, alas! to Paris or London for her corsets, her dresses, and her bonnets.

Five years have passed over the chrysanthemums since, on one of these very rare solemnities, where a few privileged ones are admitted to her presence, I had the honor of seeing her in her gardens. She was ideally charming, passing like a fairy among her parterres, flowered in profusion with the sad flowers of autumn; then coming to sit beneath her canopy of violet *crépon* (the imperial color) in the hieratic stiffness of her robes, tinted like the wings of a humming-bird. All the deliciously quaint pageantry with which she then surrounded herself gave her the charm of an unreal creature. Upon her painted lips hovered a ceremonial smile, disdainful and vague. Beneath the powder her exquisite face preserved an impenetrable expression, and notwithstanding the grace of her greeting, one felt her offended by our presence, which according to the new customs she was forced to tolerate—she, the holy Empress, invisible of yore like a religious myth.

All this is now at an end; they are relegated forever to cases and museums, the astonishing robes of millennial form, and



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the large fans of dream-land. The leveling spirit of modern times has fallen with one sudden blow upon that court of the Mikado which had remained till our days more securely walled in than a monastery, and that had preserved since the ancient ages immutable rites, customs, and elegancies.

The word has come from above; an edict of the Emperor has prescribed to the ladies of the palace the dress of their European sisters; stuffs, patterns, dress-makers, ready-made bonnets, were feverishly sent for. The first rehearsals in this travesty must have taken place with closed doors, perhaps with regrets and tears—who knows?—but more probably with laughter. And then the strangers were invited to come and see: garden parties, dances, and concerts were organized. The Japanese ladies who had been fortunate enough to travel in Europe with the embassies gave the tone to this wonderful comedy, so quickly learned. The first balls à l'Européenne given in the midst of Tokio were veritable marvels of mimicry; there were seen young girls all in white muslin, gloved to above the elbow, smiling in their chairs and holding their ivory dancing cards with the tips of their fingers; then, to opéra bouffe tunes, polking and waltzing almost in time, notwithstanding the terrible difficulties which our unknown rhythms must have occasioned to their hearing. Wines, chocolates, and ices were handed around, and all these absolutely novel refreshments were transferred from the trays with a thousand graces by very delicate hands. There were discreet flirtations, cotillon figures, and suppers.

Thank God! the new feminine masquerade is yet localized in a very restricted circle at Tokio only, and there only at court and in the official world. All these little persons—princesses, duchesses, or marchionesses (for the old Japanese titles have also been changed for their equivalents in Europe)—who almost succeeded in being charming in their sumptuous apparel of yore, are frankly ugly to-day in those new dresses that accentuate to our eyes the excessive slimness of their waists, the Asiatic flatness of their profile, and the obliquity of their eyes. Distinguished most of them are still; bizarre, badly dressed, ridiculous, I concede it, but common hardly ever. Under the awkwardness of the new manners as yet hardly

learned, under the effort of the new attitudes imposed by corsets and stays, the aristocratic refinement still persists. To be sure, it is all that is left them where-with to charm.

And it is in this period of mad transition that the grand lady of Japan presents herself to us. The world of princesses with imperceptible little dead eyes, with wide head-dresses stuck through by extravagant pins, which had remained till recent years so disdainfully impenetrable to our Western scrutiny, has all of a sudden been opened to us. By I know not what unexplained revolution, that world that seemed to have become mummified in its ancient rites and millennial modes has shaken off in a day its mysterious immobility. But its women appear to us under a disconcerting aspect, dressed like the most modern among ours, and receiving with all manner of graces in drawing-rooms imitated from Europe; and it should not be forgotten that all that is shown to us there is factitious, superficial, arranged for our benefit. Under the set expression of those faces we absolutely ignore what is passing; we should therefore not hasten to smile, and to declare insignificant those singular dolls with flat profiles. After the representation that mystifies us they certainly leave their dreadful gilded arm-chairs, their apartments furnished after the worst Western taste, and—who knows?—resuming perhaps the sumptuous emblazoned robes of the old times, they go and crouch upon their little white mats in one of those little compartments with movable paper frames that make up the traditional Japanese house; and once there, gazing with half-closed eyes on the far-away vistas of artificial gardens composed of dwarfish trees, of basins of water, and of rockery, they become themselves again—and we see nothing more. How are they then, between the panels of their dwellings, and what do they dream of between the yet closer panels of their minds? It is here that the intriguing puzzle confronts us. Within those wan heads covered with long straight hair, within those heads of strange etiolated beings, there are little brains fashioned contrariwise to ours by a long heredity of different culture; there are notions unintelligible to us about the mystery of the world, about religion and death. Do these women compose still,



JAPANESE WATER-CARRIER.

as in the old days, poems of exquisite melancholy on the flowers, on the fresh rivers, and the shadow of the woods? Are they, like their grandmothers, heroines of poems and of chivalric legends, who placed so high the point of honor, so high the ideal of love? I know not. But I think it would be rash to judge them from the everlasting and meaningless smirk which they wear.

The woman *comme il faut*, not yet Europeanized, may still be found away from Tokio, away from the court, in the other cities of the empire. She at least has not abandoned her ancient apparel. She can be met with, carried in her litter or drawn by runners in her little carriage, always very simply dressed for the street. She wears, one above the other, three or four tunics in plain light silk of sombre or neutral colors. In the middle of her back a little white rosace, discreetly embroidered, represents the blazon of her noble family. Her hair, glossed to an extraordinary perfection, is stuck through with shell pins unrelieved by brilliants or gold. If she is aged and strictly observant of the rules of the past, her eyebrows are shaved and her teeth covered with a coat of black lacquer. She is more evasive, more difficult of approach, than the woman of the middle classes, but if the stranger forces his presentation he may obtain from her some little amiable smile, some courtesy, and some polite commonplace—and nothing more.

And really one knows her almost as well after this simple greeting as the belles of the new generation with whom one has danced cotillons or Strauss waltzes at the ministerial balls. The wisest course, therefore, if one wishes to define the Japanese lady, is to declare her enigmatical.

The women of the middle classes—the women of the shop and factory—are seen everywhere so freely, and their intimacy is won so soon, that, without understanding them to their very souls, one can attempt to say a little more about them. Of these thousands of little persons met with everywhere—in the tea-houses, the theatres, the pagodas—the impression that remains is absolutely deficient of seriousness. Whenever I think of them I involuntarily smile.

Astonishing figurines, that I see once more agitated, assiduous, a little simi-

esque, running about with continual courtesies addressed to everybody, among their infinitesimal doll's baubles, in apartments as big as the hand, whose paper walls would fall in at the least blow. Women in miniature, both childish and aged, whose excessive grace, so mannered and mincing is it, turns to grimaces; whose everlasting laughter, contagious without gayety, is as irresistible as a titillation, and brings on at length the same irritating lassitude. They laugh from excess of amiability or from acquired habit; they laugh in the gravest circumstances of life; they laugh in the temples and at funerals.

Very small creatures, living in the midst of trifles as artificial and light as themselves. Their household utensils, in fine porcelain or thin metal, look like children's toys; their cups, their tea-kettles, are Liliputian, and their everlasting pipes are filled to overflowing with half a pinch of very fine tobacco, taken with the tips of their elegant little fingers.

Never seated, but crouching all day on mats of immaculate whiteness, they accomplish in that invariable posture almost all the acts of their life. It is on the floor that they take their doll's dinners, served in microscopic crockery, and eaten delicately with the aid of chopsticks. It is on the floor, behind frail screens that barely conceal them, and surrounded with a confusion of queer little instruments—of little powder-boxes, of little pots—that they proceed to their toilet, before mock mirrors that make one laugh. It is on the floor that they work, sew, embroider, play on their long-handled guitars, dream of imperceptible things, or address to their incomprehensible gods the long prayers of morning and evening.

The houses that they occupy are, it goes without saying, as neat and wondrously fashioned as themselves; almost always full of surprises, with movable panels, with boxes and slides, with compartments of all shapes and astonishing little closets. Everything is minutiously clean, even among the humblest, and of apparent simplicity, especially among the richest. Alone the altar of the ancestors, where sticks of incense burn, is gilded, lacquered, and garnished like a pagoda with vases and lanterns. Everywhere else a purposeful bareness—a bareness all the more complete and white if the dwelling pre-



A SWEEPING GIRL.

tends to elegance. No embroidered tapestries; sometimes transparent portières, made of strung beads and bamboos. And never any furniture; it is on the floor or on little lacquer pedestals that necessary objects or vases of flowers are placed. To the mistress of the house luxury consists in the very excess of that cleanliness of which I spoke above, and which is one of the incontestable qualities of the Japanese people. It is everywhere the custom to unshoe before entering a house, and nothing equals the whiteness of those mats, upon which one never walks without fine socks with divided toes. The wood-work itself is white, neither painted nor varnished, keeping as its sole ornamentation, among women of true taste, the imperceptible veins of the young pine.

In our part of the world when we speak of Japanese women we immediately figure to ourselves persons clad in dazzling robes such as they send us—robes of tender shades without name, embroidered with long flowers, great chimeras, and fantastic birds. A mistake! These dresses are reserved for the theatre, or for a certain nameless class of women, who live in a special quarter, and of whom I cannot speak here. The women of Japan dress all in dark colors; they wear, to a great extent, stuffs of cotton or wool, almost always plain, or strewn with dim and misty little designs, whose equally dark colors can hardly be distinguished from the background. Marine blue is the general and dominating tint; so much so that a feminine crowd in gala dress composes itself from afar into a mass of black-blue, a swarming of the same color, relieved only here and there by brilliant reds, or the light shades worn by little girls or babies.

The shape of those dresses is well known; in all the pictures with which Japan overwhelms us they are seen painted or drawn. Their large and floating sleeves allow free play to the arms, that are of a light amber color, generally well turned, and terminating in hands in invariably pretty. The toilet is completed by those large sashes called *obi*, which are usually of magnificent silk, and whose regular shells, spreading out like the wings of monstrous butterflies at the bottom of the frail little backs, lend so peculiar and artificial a grace to the silhouettes of the women. Our para-

sols, in silks of neutral colors, are beginning to replace for certain ladies of fashion the charming variegated parasols of yore, upon which, among flowers and birds, were often written suave thoughts, due to ancient poets. As for our shoes, they have only been adopted as yet in Tokio, among the high official world; everywhere else the antique sandal is worn, attached between the toes, and left in the anterooms, as with us the cane and hat, blocking up the entrance of the fashionable tea-houses, or piled up in close layers on the exterior steps of the pagodas on days of solemn prayer. On rainy days, besides the sandals, are worn, for street errands, clogs with high wooden skates, that sound noisily on the pavement when the dresses are tucked up, and that would make any European woman fall after the second step. These ladies walk with the heels outside, as prescribed by fashion, and with the back slightly curved forward, which is doubtless due to hereditary abuse of the courtesy.

Their head-gear is also known of the whole world; with two or three strokes of the brush the Japanese painters know how to reproduce it under all its aspects, or caricature it with rare happiness. But what most people doubtless ignore is that even the most careful and elegant women have their hair dressed only two or three times a week: their chignons and bands are so solidly fixed by specialists that they last at need several days without losing their smooth and lustrous brilliancy. It is true that in order not to disarrange these structures during the nightly slumbers the ladies always sleep on the back, without pillows, the head in the air, supported by a sort of little lacquer bridge that fits into the nape of the neck. I had forgotten to say that it is also on the floor that they sleep, upon wadded mattresses so light that they would be used by us as coverlets. For sleep they always very chastely array themselves in long night-gowns of an invariable blue; and discreet lamps, shaded by paper frames, watch incessantly over their dreams, in order to frighten away the evil spirits of darkness who, all around the little houses of light wood, might be floating in the air.

In Japan the women of the people and of the lower middle classes participate in almost all the labors of the men. They



JAPANESE MOUSMI.



GROUP OF JAPANESE BOYS WITH A BIRD-CAGE.

little dresses, tie up their hair in inimitable knots, give them an air of exquisite comicality!

I do not know whether they are absolutely good, but at least they are neither bad, nor coarse, nor quarrelsome. Their politeness cannot but be unalterable; the Japanese language does not count a single word of insult, and in the world of porters and fish-mongers the most exquisite formulas of the *Régence* are in use. I have seen two poor old hags, who were picking up on the beach the coal thrown away by the steamers, expend themselves in endless ceremonies, disputing as to who should not take such and such a litigated piece, and then address courtesies and wonderful compliments to one another with the air of marquises of the old *régime*.

Notwithstanding their very real frivolity and

understand business and bargaining, they cultivate the earth, they sell, they work in the factories, and they even serve as carriers.

In early youth, if they are pretty, they often leave the parental roof to enter, as laughing and attractive little maids, the inns and tea-houses. There, for a while, they increase the number of those innumerable *mousmis*, whose business it is to serve and gladden the passing stranger in all the places where he may seek repose, drink, or amusement.

They are adorable as mothers and grandmothers; it is pleasant to see the tender and touching care they give to their little ones, even among the lowest classes, the loving intelligence with which they know how to amuse them and invent astonishing toys. And with what perfect art, with what comprehension of childish drollery, with what profound knowledge of what becomes very young faces, do they deck them out in deliciously absurd

the silliness of their perpetual laughter, notwithstanding their air of being mere dolls endowed with springs, it would be unjust to refuse them all elevation of ideas; they have the sentiment of the poetry of things, of the great vague soul of nature, of the charm of flowers, of forests, of silences, of moon rays. They tell of those things in verses a little affected, having the grace of those leaves and reeds, both very natural and very improbable, that are painted on their silks and lacquer. In short, they are like the objects of virtue of their own country, trifles of extreme exquisiteness, but which it is prudent to look over before bringing to Europe, for fear that some impropriety may lurk behind a bamboo stem or beneath a sacred stork. They may also be compared to those Japanese fans which, opened from right to left, represent the most delicate sprays of flowers, but which change to indecencies if opened in the contrary direction, from left to right.



JAPANESE CHILDREN ON A PIAZZA.

Their music, of which they are passionately fond, is for us strange and far away like their souls. When the young girls gather in the evening to sing and play on their long guitars, we feel, after the first smile of wonder, the impression of something very unknown and very mysterious, which years of intellectual acclimation would not enable us to completely grasp.

Their religion must appear very complicated and confused to their little giddy brains, when even the most learned priests of their country lose themselves in their cosmogonies, their symbols, their metamorphoses of gods in that millenary chaos upon which the Buddhism of India has so strangely foisted itself without destroying anything. Their most serious cult seems to be that of their defunct ancestors. These shades or familiar gods possess in each household a perfumed altar, before which the living pray long at morning and night, without, however, believing absolutely in the immortality of the soul, and in the persistence of the hu-

man ego as understood by our Occidental religions.

To the religious contradictions which baffle us must be added superstitions as old as the world, the strangest or the gloomiest, and fearful to listen to at night. Beings half gods and half ghosts haunt the black darkness; at crossways in the woods stand ancient idols gifted with singular powers; there are miraculous stones in the depths of forests. And to have an approximate idea of the faith of these women with small oblique eyes, one must reduce to chaos all that I have just said, then try to transpose it into giddy brains that laughter prevents most of the time from thinking, and that seem at moments to have the heedlessness of the brains of birds.

Withal, they are assiduous in their attendance at all the pilgrimages, which are constant, at all the ceremonies and festivals in the temples.

During the fair season they come in smiling troops, two or three times a month,



A JAPANESE GIRL SEWING.

from all corners of the country to pagodas deliciously situated in the country, covering the little roads, the little bridges, with the incessant passing of their marine-blue dresses, and with the wide shells of their black head-dresses.

In the big cities, on almost every summer evening, there is a pilgrimage to some sanctuary or other—sometimes in honor of a god so ancient that nobody remembers exactly his rôle in the world. After business of all kinds, with its bargains and barter, has been suspended, after the innumerable petty trades have stopped their monotonous noise, when the myriads of little houses and shops begin to put up their light shutters, the women dress themselves, ornament their hair with their most extravagant pins, and set out, holding at the end of flexible sticks great painted lanterns. The streets are filled to overflowing with their little persons, ladies or *mousmis*, walking slowly in sandals and exchanging charming courtesies. With an immense murmur of fluttering fans, of rustling silks, and of laughing chatter, at dusk, by the light of the moon, or beneath the starry night, they ascend to the pagoda, where gigantic gods with horrible masks await them, half hidden

behind bars of gold, in the incredible magnificence of the sanctuaries. They throw pieces of money to the priests, they pray prostrated and clapping their hands with sharp blows, *clack, clack*, as though their fingers were of wood. But most of the time they are chattering, turning around, thinking of something else, attempting to escape by laughter from the fear of the supernatural.

The peasant woman, clad summer and winter in the same dress of blue cotton, and hardly distinguishable afar from her husband, who wears his hair in a knot like hers, and is clad in a robe of the same color—the peasant woman who is daily seen bowing over her toil in the tea fields or in the liquid mud of the rice swales, protected by a rough hat on days when the sun burns, and having her head completely enveloped when the north wind blows by a dreadful muffler, always blue, that only leaves the almond eyes to view—the small and funny peasant woman of Japan, wherever she may be sought for, even in most remote districts of the interior, is incontestably much more refined than our peasant woman of the West. She has pretty hands and pretty delicate

feet; a mere touch would suffice to transform her into one of those ladies that are painted on vases or transparent screens, and there would be little left to teach her of mannered graces, of affectations of all sorts. She almost always cultivates a pretty garden around her ancient cottage of wood, whose interior, garnished with white mats, is scrupulously clean. Her household utensils, her little cups, her little pots, her little dishes, instead of being, as with us, of common earthen-ware daubed with brilliant flowers, are of transparent porcelain decorated with those light and fine paintings that bear witness of themselves to a long heredity of art. She arranges with original taste the altar of her humble ancestors. Finally, she knows how to arrange in her vases, with the least spray of verdure, slender bouquets that the most artistic among our women would hardly be capable of composing.

She may possibly be more honest than her sister of the cities, and her life may be more regular—from our European point of view, of course; she is also more reserved with strangers, more timid, with a sort of mistrust and dislike of the intruders, notwithstanding her amiable welcome and her smiles.

In the villages of the interior, far from the recent railroads and from all modern importations, in places where the mille-

nary immobility of the land has not been disturbed, the peasant woman has probably changed but little from what must have been, several centuries ago, her most remote ancestor, whose soul, vanished in time, has even ceased to hover over the family altar. At the barbaric periods of our Western history, when our mothers still preserved something of the grand and wild rudeness of primitive times, there lived doubtless yonder, in those isles at the east of the ancient world, these same little peasant women, so polite and so mincing, and also these same little ladies of the cities, so civilized, with their adorable courtesies.

In short, if the Japanese women of all classes are small of body and mind, artificial, and affected, with I know not what of worn and aged in the soul from the very beginning of life, it is perhaps because their race has remained for too many centuries separated from the rest of humanity, living on itself, and never renovated. It would be as unjust to reproach them for it as it would be to reproach them for their ugliness without eyes; and one should be thankful to them for being amiable, gracious, and gay; for having made of Japan the country of ingenious and droll little things—the country of prettinesses and laughter.

MR. GIBBLE COLT'S DUCKS.

BY RICHARD MALCOLM JOHNSTON.

"*Dux femina facti.*"—ÆNEIS.

I.

"I HAVE come to the conclusions that what I want is a little duck, to call mine."

He had the solemnity not uncommon in very tall, rather slim, and moderately dark gentlemen, old enough to know what they are talking about when the matter is their own individual, special wants. The announcement excited some surprise, even a little fluttering; therefore I shall proceed to tell briefly the conditions of the speaker and his audience that led to it.

Property of the value of about one hundred dollars, his share in his father's estate, by accretions in one way and another during the twenty years since the majority of Mr. Gibble Colt, had amount-

ed to five hundred—perhaps a little over. In this while he had lived with an older sister, wife of Mr. Isaac Spillers, his services about the house, the yard, the garden, the horse lot, and the cow pen being taken as equivalent for board. The small farm was situate a couple of miles from the village of Red Oak, and bordered on the public road leading thence to Augusta. The land was not more thin and gravelly than the average in that militia district, which, by a pleasant conceit of one of the early settlers, had been named "Pea Ridge." Notwithstanding his great length and solemnity, Mr. Colt was a man affectionate in his feelings. Therefore, although he shed not many tears, he was much grieved at the death of his sister.