

## *With an Artist in Japan.*

BY RAYMOND BLATHWAYT.

ILLUSTRATED BY MORTIMER MENPES.

**I**N Kyoto last spring Mr. Mortimer Menpes—"Japanese Menpes" as he is termed by his brother artists in England—and I spent several days and nights studying the charming variety of life for which Japan is more celebrated perhaps than any other country even in the charming East. I came across Menpes seated in a Japanese theatre one bright morning.

"Here I am, you see," said he, as he bade me sit down beside him, "making studies of the actor's life in Japan. I have got the whole theatre and ten actors, as you see, all posing at once upon the stage, and I pay only 3s. 6d. an hour. Fancy hiring the Lyceum, with Irving and Forbes Robertson thrown in, for a sum like that.

"Now, look at this theatre," he continued, "and look at that group of actors, and see what a perfect harmony, without one single discord, they produce. Vivid, and yet harmonious and restful. Is that instinct or science? I should say science. Do you notice, too, that they don't go in for realism as we do? Herkomer's moon hurriedly rising and setting would be impossible in this land of born artists. Oh! look at that beautiful man," he continued, pointing to the stage whereon lay a man with a pocket-handkerchief thrown across his body. "He's a corpse. He has been killed in a fierce encounter which took place just before you came in. You see, he's getting up and strolling off the stage, just as he would if the people crowded the theatre, and the piece were in full swing. And quite rightly, too. He argues within himself: 'Why should I stay here? Since no one

believes I am really killed; since I am no longer wanted, why should I waste my time stopping about here?' You see, realism is never attempted in a Japanese theatre. Like all their art, it is a mere suggestion. Do you know how they light up their actors? Instead of their standing in a blaze of lime-light, they—but I'll get them to show you, and you shall see for yourself. Tell them," and as he spoke he turned to his interpreter, "to do that piece over again."

The man called out to the men, a moment's hesitation of preparation, and several actors, at once assuming tragic poses, stalked solemnly about the stage, each one of them being followed by a man carrying a long, red-lacquered stick in his hand like a fishing-rod, and in which stuck a flickering, guttering candle, by which a fitful illumination was cast upon those quaint, highly-decorated faces.

"Notice the double-handed swords, the extraordinary poses; watch them changing their costumes, painting their faces, putting on their masks, all of which they do in full view of their audience. Oh! they're funny people! I was here the other day at a full performance. The musicians sat behind and formed a sort of Greek

chorus, commenting on the actors, asking questions of them, applauding or deploring their motives. The prompters crawled about, now and again rushing up to a man, and prompting him in a loud voice. Half the actors were down amongst the audience, and when they heard their cue they would push through the spectators, acting as they went. You can imagine how charming those vivid emerald green and gold dresses are by night,



MR. MORTIMER MENPES.  
*From a Photo. by Mendelssohn.*



IN A JAPANESE THEATRE.

with the orange light and the bluish background, and how beautiful the whole thing is in this dim, religious light.

"But I'll finish up now," continued my friend, as with a few swift, dexterous strokes he painted in the decorative waves meant to

illustrate a seaside resort, which had been wheeled in behind the actors.

"There! now we'll go for a walk," and so we passed out together into a perfect blaze of brilliant sunshine.

Kyoto, the ancient capital of Japan, with



THE HAND ACTION OF ACTOR.

a thousand years of history and more behind it, is situated in the Province of Yamashiro, in the very heart of Japan. Lovely green-clad hills and mountains stand round about it on all sides, and dividing it almost exactly in half flows the Kamogawa, or River of Wild Ducks, which empties itself in Osaka Bay.

In the centre of the beautiful city, said to be in many respects the most interesting in

obtained by means of a stately flight of stone steps, is hung a great bell, the bell of the Buddhist priests, and the largest bell in Japan. It is 18ft. in height and some 900 years old. Eight men are required to manipulate the huge piece of timber by which it is sounded, in order that it may be swung with accurate precision so as not to deaden the sound; and then, when well done, as it was the day we heard it, how magnificent is the deep



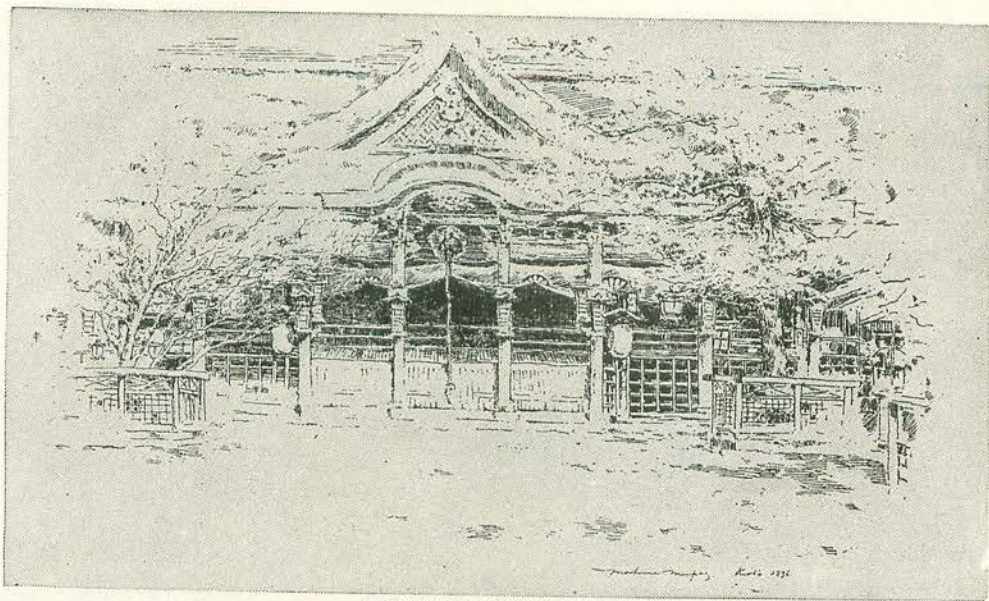
THE DOUBLE-HANDED SWORD.

Japan, lies Goshō, the ancient residence of the Mikados, and on the hill-side is the wonderful monastery of Chionin, and here, far up amid the rafters of the gracefully arched roof—and till you have been to Japan you do not know all the beauties and possibilities that exist in a roof—we caught a glimpse of the umbrella that the architect had left three centuries ago.

Just behind the monastery and the temple, to which access from the valley beneath is

boom that solemnly pulsates through the valley, dying away at length upon the summer breeze with a quivering sweetness, which once heard can never be forgotten.

Up and down those steps, leading to lofty fanes and long-drawn aisles of dark-hued fir-trees, passed Buddhist monks and priests, and citizens of Kyoto, and of the wider world beyond—for Kyoto is the resort of pilgrims and of tourists innumerable—and flickering in and out of the



A TEMPLE GATEWAY IN KYOTO.

sunlight, flecked by alternate light and shadow, tripped the sweet little *musumés*, without whose charm of presence Japan would lose half its attraction for the Western traveller.

Mortimer Menpes and I wended our slow way to a public park, wherein the people were keeping one of their many holidays. Our slow way, I say advisedly, for my friend stopped now and again to make a sketch of something or someone that caught his fitful fancy. Now it was a temple, half obscured by the lovely cherry blossom, which snowed pink and white upon the ground beneath; now it was a tradesman in his shop, a carpenter at his bench, drawing his tool *to* him, instead of pushing it *from* him as with us; or it was a stencil cutter, or a potter in a tumble-down shed, and with the rudest implements, producing, nevertheless, the exquisite vessels for which Kyoto is so justly celebrated.

"You must see Kanzan's pottery before you leave," said Menpes; "and notice those lovely ducks, those

butterflies wheeling and turning in a summer sky, those lovely flowers that he produces upon his cups. Kanzan is the Minton of



A CARPENTER AT HIS BENCH.



A STENCIL CUTTER.

Japan, and he is far more, for no European can approach him."

By this time we were passing the outskirts of the town. The rice and indigo fields lay rich and green and marshy around us, the little pools of water sparkling in the rays of the setting sun, and the air resonant with the tremendous croaking of thousands upon thousands of frogs. The 'ricksha men hurried by, chattering vigorously as they ran, with their splendidly developed legs glancing in and out of the shafts of their machines. Forty miles a day, drawing a heavy load, these men will run, at a fast trot that scarcely ever knows variation or diminution. And now we

came to the park, wherein the people made holiday—and not Frenchmen or Italians can enjoy themselves more light-heartedly than the Japanese on pleasure bent.



A POTTER.

Amongst the men there was plenty of drunkenness. I never saw more on a Bank Holiday in England. It was more like a Saturday evening in Scotland, except that there was not a drunken woman to be seen. But the men had evidently gone in strongly for their beloved saké, which is, I fancy, at once the popular drink and the greatest curse of Japan. Many of the people, however, sat quietly enough, drinking tea in the quaint little tea-houses, which are so everyday a feature in Japanese



A JAPANESE BOY.

life. But beyond all, and above all, were the children. Japan is a very paradise of babies, and children rule the roost entirely in the Land of the Rising Sun

"Now, I am happy," said my friend, as he pulled out his sketch-book, sat himself down upon a handy bench, and began to sketch a group of little boys who stood wonderingly around.

Soon he picked out for special notice the little fellow of whom so charming a likeness here appears. I wandered on by myself to admire the wonderful interest of the varied scene around me. I came across a group of little girls—and for once I wish I were a woman that I could do technical and artistic justice to their beautiful costumes—engaged in a game of battledore and shuttlecock.

The little women—for such they are—were evidently *en fête*, and had probably come from a children's party; they wore for the most part blue, flowered silk kimonos; their faces, which they treat exactly as an artist does his canvas, were painted deathly white, and their pretty mouths were as red as those of their own beloved dolls, which, indeed, they very closely resembled. Their wooden clouts clattered loudly but not altogether un-musically upon the ground as they rushed here and there intent upon the progress of their game. The shuttlecock was a golden bulb stuck full of feathers to resemble the petals of a flower.

And here I noticed, exactly as I had read, that the boys stood round chaffing their sisters and singing a song, which they have

probably sung from time immemorial, that the winds might rise and blow away the shuttlecock, whilst the little girls replied in chorus with a song, in which they prayed the winds to calm themselves within their cave. The girls who failed to hit their shuttlecock were punished with ink marks upon their white painted faces, or with circles drawn black round their merry eyes. Gentle little maidens are they in Japan, taught to defer in all things to their brothers, who in many respects are the most odious specimens of humanity that it has ever been my misfortune to encounter.

What a Japanese boy requires, and what unfortunately he never gets, is a good thrashing at stated intervals; that would make a man of him. At present, as matters stand, he is pampered and petted till he becomes absolutely unendurable, so that he is growing up a source of misery to himself and to his friends, and in the not far future a source of absolute danger to the community at large.

Japan's chief source of danger, her gloomiest outlook for the future, lies in her ill-regulated and totally undisciplined young manhood. However, this is not a political dissertation, so we will go on with the child-life of which we now and again obtained such charming glimpses that afternoon and evening in the public park at Kyoto. For evening was now descending, calm and peaceful, upon the great and ancient city.



PLAYING THE "SAMISEN."

"The beauty of Japan," said Menpes, as we strolled about together, "is its wonderful variety. The child-life of the country is more beautiful here than anywhere else, it is so all-

depicting those aspects as well as I can for my next Bond Street Exhibition; the day, or silver side; the night, or golden side. Can you not see what I mean? Let us



AN ACTOR.



A BOY ACTOR.



AN ACTOR.

pervading, so characteristic; there is, besides, the life of the merchant, the artificer, the artist, the actor, the musician, but above and beyond all is the child-life you see all around you. Look at that girl now," he continued, as he pointed to a pretty little maiden standing at the fast-closed door of one of the ridiculous little toy-houses by which we were surrounded, crooning her innocent little song and twanging upon the *samisen*, just as Menpes, who then and there made a sketch of her, has depicted in the little picture here reproduced.

"Here, too, in Japan," he murmured, as he folded up his drawing materials and as we resumed our walk, "how sharply is the difference defined between night and day. I see two sides to the daily life in Japan, and I am

stand aside for a moment, and watch what goes on, and you will soon gather my meaning."

And, indeed, what we saw was beautiful and suggestive in the

extreme. The moon was just topping the neighbouring hill, and silvering the firs and pines with her calm and quiet light, so different from the fierce glare of the day; the temples stood outlined clear and sharp against the evening sky, from which the last red light of the setting sun had scarcely yet died away. Some blind men passed us, going swiftly but silently along, making a low, peculiar whistle as they walked. The electric tram-cars, crammed with people, rushed along the crowded streets; the river tinkled along its shallow bed; a thousand cries assailed the stars glittering afar off in lonely majesty.



AN ACTRESS.

"What a difference," remarked my friend, "between a fine night and a rainy night there is in Kyoto, to be sure. In London there is but little—everything goes on much as when it is fine; but here, on a wet night, the streets are still as death, and all these queer, mysterious little people are hidden within their tiny houses, and scarcely a candle-gleam to tell what has become of them; but on a fine night, like this, the hum and bustle is everywhere and continuous. I remember Mr. Griffin says much the same thing in 'The Mikado's Empire.'"

At this moment we came upon a group of musicians and actors going, presumably, to the theatre, and Mr. Menpes, through his interpreter, asked to be allowed to make a sketch of one or two, a request which met with an immediate and delighted response, for the Japanese, unlike many Easterns, have a great pleasure in seeing themselves upon canvas.

The guide told me that the *samisen*, or banjo, which one of the women carried, is quite a modern instrument, having been brought over from Manila within the last 200 years. Music in Japan, as in the East generally, consists of what to us, with our ideas of sweet sounds, appears to be little inferior to the most extraordinary series of discords. There is one very curious ceremony which takes place at certain great shinto festivals, and that is the performance by the

band of Court musicians attached to the Bureau of Rites of the silent concert.

On these occasions the musicians appear with string and wind instruments, and go through all the motions of playing, without a single instrument emitting a sound, it being held that the sanctity of the occasion would be profaned were any sound to fall on unworthy ears. Music—certain kinds of it,

that is—is handed down in secret from family to family, it being hereditary in certain families.

The chanting of the Buddhist Liturgy is classical, and is not unlike the well-known Gregorian channs. But as a matter of fact, music is never taken really seriously by the Japanese. The streets were full of children, for it was the eve of the Fifth day of the Fifth month, the festival, that is, of the boys. Already the gardens and streets, the hill-sides and country roads throughout the whole country, were gay with the *nobori*, or paper fish, which, of gigantic size and of exquisite colouring and most perfect make, were floating from trees and poles and chimneys and breeze that blew

walls, and which by every were enormously inflated.

"To-morrow," said Menpes, "is the Feast of Flags, or Boys' Day. These fishes are a sign that a boy has been born in the family during the year, or that there are sons in the family. The girls have their day on the 3rd of March, *Hina Matsun*, or Feast



A JAPANESE CHILD.



of Dolls. How queer that little chap looks with his head shaven. Their heads when shaven appear of abnormal size. It is quite a universal fashion and, I imagine, a very ancient one. The head is shaved altogether for the first three years. After this, the hair is allowed to grow in three tufts, one over each ear and the other at the nape of the neck. At ten years of age

in far-away Japan, and sung, too, by little *musumés*. How on earth did they get hold of that, I wonder?"

"But what to me is so curious," said I, "is the extraordinary way in which they mingle pessimism and playfulness, pathos and humour. Miss Isabella Bird went into a school once and found a number of these joyous little girls reciting a poem as pessi-



DOLL-MAKERS.

the boy is allowed to grow all but a round space on the crown, which exactly resembles a Roman priest's tonsure. At fifteen, when the boy becomes a man, his hair is allowed to grow in full.

"Curious mixture, these children are," continued my friend, as a very large school of charming little girls, some 200 in number, filed by us two-by-two, and who, to my mingled delight and astonishment, were singing, with great sweetness, and in perfect time, the well-known English song, "In the gloaming, oh, my darling."

"There, just imagine hearing that song

mistic as the gloomiest of the Psalms of David:—

Colour and perfume vanish away.

What can be lasting in this world?

To-day disappears in the abyss of nothingness:

It is but the passing image of a dream, and causes only a slight trouble."

"Their favourite game, as I daresay you know," said Menpes, "is that of funerals."

At this moment we passed a doll-maker's shop, in which sat a couple of girls manufacturing little puppets that to the life resembled the ridiculous little boys who were eagerly looking on, and who probably served as unconscious models to the busy artists,

who turned the toys off so rapidly. While Menpes sketched them, I strolled over the way to where a crowd of children were breathlessly bending over a man who was busy at something in their midst. The man turned out to be one of those of whom I had often heard, who was engaged in painting a picture of coloured sand upon the ground. One of the crowd was a little girl with her baby-brother fast asleep strapped upon her back, as is the way of the country.

On each side of a patch of sand, so spread as exactly to resemble a huge piece of white paper, stood two lamps, and on this he drew his picture with coloured sands taken from half-a-dozen different bags, and into which he would dip his hand now and again, letting the black sand trickle from his fingers and go at will, sketching the outline of a fish or a man, or anything else, and then he would colour the sketch, sometimes doing two colours at once.

"They are wonderful artists," said my friend; "when I get home I will give you an exact reproduction of Kyosai's blacksmith at work. You will then see what life and animation a Japanese artist can convey by a few rapid strokes. He never hesitates. He has the picture in his mind's eye, and in a moment he reproduces it, to the life, upon

his paper or silk, as the case may be. I once saw Kyosai sit down upon the floor and, with incredible rapidity, and, if I may so express it, sureness of aim, depict a stork in a very difficult and peculiar attitude. I thought, perhaps, it was a stock subject, like the fish a street artist draws upon the London pavements.

"'Not a bit,' said he; 'that bird lives in my garden, and I saw it in that attitude in the morning. I went away, made a sketch, came back again, found the bird still in the same attitude; I studied it carefully again, went back to my picture, made the alterations I thought necessary, and so now I can do it perfectly from memory. How can your artists attempt to sketch a figure in action, as I am told they do, from a man standing perfectly still in the first attitude of running? That can only really be done by an effort of memory. Tell your artists to train their memory and their eye. Let them study what they see. Why should an artist study anatomy? He isn't a doctor. He should depict the action of the muscles as shown in the flesh-covered legs and arms.' That was Kyosai's theory, and he was a great artist. And now," said my friend, "let us to our beds with what hearts we may."

*Sayonara*, "Good-bye, come again soon."

