

Children of the Wild at Play

By William G. FitzGerald

HUMAN nature is much the same the world over, and this is particularly so in the case of children. In savage countries, however, while it is true that the children may have more time for play, they are also worked excessively hard, and cruelty prevails to a frightful extent, either by reason of long-established custom as in the case of the bound feet of Chinese girls and the child-widows of India, or else by reason of the operation of savage instincts on the part of the parents.

Talking of child-widows, would it be believed that, according to a recent census of India, out of thirty-eight million girls under the age of fifteen, twenty-four millions are widows, of whom seventy-eight thousand are under nine years of age?

Miss Clark, a woman missionary, writing from the Jagraon district of India, said: "Ignorance among the mothers is terrible. They asked me if it was wrong to strangle their girl babies!"

Indian children are expected to care for and drive the dogs, cut logs in the forest and haul them home, afterward splitting them into stove-wood. Their time is also pretty fully occupied in trapping fur-bearing animals, helping with fish traps and nets, sailing boats and paddling birch canoes. Their little sisters cook, sew and embroider. They also cut and dry fish and tan skins.

Among savage races it may be accepted as a broad fact that only the strongest children are permitted to grow up; and these do contrive to have a good time in life. Having no school to attend, and being racially opposed to all work, they turn naturally to devising what seems to us curious sports and games—pastimes entirely unknown in civilized countries—if it is only run-

and even on their own bodies, representing birds, beasts and reptiles, both natural and unnatural.

In China the children are in their element during the fairs which are held by their elders in the Buddhist temples, when a few "cash" are given to them for fruit and candy. A

"cash," by the way, is less than one-tenth of a cent. The children's great fun

duced this almost universal institution. It is a fact that the Chinese characters or "ideographs" representing the word "dolls" signify "foreign babies."

Vastly different, however, is the case in Japan, and this minor question of little girls' dolls is one of the points upon which the two great far-Eastern nations differ widely. When the writer was in Nagasaki he knew two little girls whose names translated meant "Little Plum" and "Cedar"; and right eagerly were they looking forward to the great "Feast of Dolls" which comes once a year on the third of March.

It is the greatest day of the year for the little girls. Of course, the boys don't care much about it because their great day, known as the "Feast of Flags," comes in May.

On the eve of the great feast, Little Plum and Cedar washed all the ink off their hands, hung up their copybooks and put aside their ink-stones with more than customary satisfaction. And the two sisters were soon in bed with their heads on the funny little pillows made of pieces of wood with cushions on top.

Indian Child and Her Playhouse

The moment they were asleep their mothers began to prepare the toys and dolls, together with the dolls' dinner and tea services. Next morning Little Plum and Cedar quickly dressed in their best red crepe and figured silk, but could not eat much breakfast, so great was their anxiety to see the dolls.

Would it be believed that they had over a hundred of them? For Japan is above all other nations the country of dolls. And they seem to be handed down from generation to generation. Certainly some of Little Plum's were two or three centuries old. There were mikados and mikados' wives and tycoons and tycoonesses, ladies and gentlemen of the courts, boy babies and girl babies.

Then there were all kinds of furniture for these grandees, together with traveling boxes and trunks of sandal-wood and camphor-wood.

Boys the world over naturally turn to warlike sports and games, and more particularly practice with the bow and arrow. Away up in the wilds of Alaska, there is a mission station called Anvik where there is a Christian school for Eskimo boys and girls. The disturbances of the studies of these young people are due to causes that strike us as strange, such as the sudden on-coming of walrus, seals, polar bear or other good food or fur.

The school "breaking-up" time at Anvik is marked by a most curious shooting competition. Each of the boys chooses a little girl much as in the days of chivalry when the tournament knight had the eyes of his mistress upon him; and then the eager lad commences to shoot at kerosene cans with an aim more or less unerring. In the event of success, the little Eskimo lady whose champion he is comes ministering unto him with—lumps of sugar!



Alaskan Schoolboys Shooting for Sugar at Anvik

ning races up coconut trees as we may see the Gikuki African boys doing.

House-building as a pastime among children appears to be universal. Even in the cannibal villages of central Africa you will see the children building tiny huts of "wattle and daub" which are faithful reproductions on a small scale of the houses that they were born and bred in.

The "wattle" is simply a kind of wicker-work, and the "daub" is the stuff wherewith the chinks are stopped. This most curious of mortars is made from the earth of the ant-heaps; and with this primitive material the children in the villages of the great lakes construct whole villages of tiny huts.

The Papuan child of New Guinea naturally constructs her doll's house on piles, or stilts, in the water, reproducing faithfully the wonderful pile-built village of Port Moresby in the British section of the great island continent.

Again, the Eskimo child will construct igloos of snow plastered around small whale bones; and of course the Indian child will construct the tepee of her ancestors as the only rightful and legitimate place of repose for her dolls.

One great game of central African children is to suspend a plantain or other fruit or vegetable from a branch by means of some strong creeping plant. At this mark they will then throw spears with wonderful skill—much as the children do in their mimic *corroborees* among the aboriginal tribes of central Australia. The little black fellows of Australia, however, suspend a small ring as a mark instead of a vegetable.

All savage children, too, seem to have an inborn love of drawing; and they will reproduce crude and comic pictures on the interior bark walls of the houses,

in China is the fire-cracker, which at the time of the Chinese New Year makes the day a time of wearisome unrest and the night hideous. Then again, kite-flying is universal in China and probably originated there. The most comic thing is that a small boy may be flying one kite, and his grandfather, a patriarch of ninety, gravely flying another by his side.

The Chinese boys, and also his brethren of Siam and the states of Indo-China, also has his fighting crickets, big fellows several inches long. To the long leg of each combatant a string is tied by its owner. The insects fight to the death, as do the gold fish.

Chinese children appear to be born gamblers, sad to say; they will gamble with "cash" morning, noon and night; and among their sisters dolls are practically



Gikuki Boys Climbing a Coconut Tree