

IT'S CHERRY BLOSSOM TIME IN JAPAN



CHERRY BANK AT KOGANEI, MOST BEAUTIFUL DISPLAY OF BLOSSOMS IN ALL JAPAN.

IN A CARNIVAL GROVE

CHERRY BLOSSOM FESTIVAL AT UENO PARK, TOKIO.

THE beautiful and symbolic "cherry blossom festival" is Japan's Easter.

It celebrates a resurrection, not the arising of a deity, a redeemer, as in the case of the great Christian festival, but the rebirth of the fruits and flowers after six months of death.

But there is religious feeling in the ceremony of the cherry blossom festival, for it comes in April, at the same time as the festival of the Higan, and the two fetes, while separate and having entirely different significance, are more or less identified in the mind of the dweller in Nippon because of the fact that he rejoices over both at the same time.

It seems not an exaggeration to say that even in Japan, land of the picturesque, there is nothing so beautiful as this annual rejoicing of the childlike little brown men and women over the return of the cherry blossom.

During the days that the trees are bearing the burden of pink petals the Japanese live in the cherry groves. Continually they are bathed in a fragrant snow of the blossoms.

Young men bedeck their sweethearts with the blooms, and send notes containing Cupid's message on boughs stripped from the trees. The swain who can carry his branch so carefully that the petals are not shaken off in transit is sure that the gods favor his suit and that the maiden of his chelos must listen to his supplications.

The Japanese have other floral festivals, for they are notably worshippers of the fairest handwork of nature. There are seasons when the glories of the wistaria, azalea, iris, lotus, chrysanthemum, orchid, peony and the leaves of autumn draw the people into the public places for diversion, but in popularity the cherry blossom outstrips them all.

It is the springtime. The balmy air has sent youthful spirits bubbling, and made the old forget their woes.

On every one of the five hundred inhabited islands of the Japanese archipelago, cherry blossoms are decking the trees. The Jap is the most skilled arboriculturist in the world. He can train trees and plants to grow when he will and in any shape.

He accomplishes wonders with the cherry tree. He does everything with it, in fact, but make it grow good fruit. The Japanese cherry is quite unimportant, in most cases, tasteless and small, but no one cares. The cherry tree is only called on to furnish the blooms for the Japanese Easter. Let other trees produce the food.

With deft mastery, the Japanese gardener shapes the cherry tree into groves that hang over the road, so that in season, when the blossoms are out, the people walk under a bower of pink glory.

Cherry Blossom Time

Nothing could be fresher and more springlike than the dainty petals of the arching trees, and as soon as the first shoots appear and the trees begin to put on their pink coats, Japan takes a holiday.

Out from their homes come the peo-

ple on equal terms, they have not had the unfortunate effect of changing his simplicity of temperament.

Play Hours of the Land

On the battlefield, in his business or in statecraft he may be a cold, calculating, keen, daring man, but at home in his holidays he is a child.

To Ueno Park on Cherry Blossom Sunday the whole population repairs.

The avenue of cherry trees going up from the town forms a perfect arch of pink boughs, under which the people throng. The tea houses have spread their best red blankets on the matted platforms. Under the trees are cherry picnic parties, laughing from the very joy of life in the open, with the air scented and the eye charmed by the most beautiful of springtime blooms.

A group of young men, each carrying a bough of cherry blossoms thrown across the shoulder, at their belts saki bottles, which they stop every now and then to have filled, drink and laugh, confident that should the joyfulness of the occasion make them overstep the bounds of propriety—a rare thing for a Japanese—some good friend will remember that it is holiday time, put them on a kuruma and send them home, to resolve that such a thing will never happen till another cherry blossom time comes around again.

This saki bottle is as near as the Japanese Easter comes to one of the great essentials of the American celebration of the holiday season, and those who have tried both say that the innocent looking saki can have quite as painful effects if kept tilted too long.

At Mukojima is a double avenue of cherry trees, stretching along the banks of the Sumida. This is perhaps the finest display of blossoms in all Japan, and Mukojima is the great gathering place of the mumsers.

In the costume, pink and white, the colors of the cherry blossoms predominate, and in performing their tricks these brown skinned Kellars and Herrmanns delight especially in drawing from tiny receptacles an endless procession of cherry blossoms.

What religious observance comes into the cherry blossom festival is the result of coincidence with the festival of Higan. This marks the anniversary of the happy day when Buddha, the Japanese deity, passed over from the turmoil of life into the blissful forgetfulness of the Nirvana. This festival causes religious and secular celebrations to join with most incongruous result. The wildest of revels mark a time that is supposed to be more sacred than any which comes in the calendar of Buddha.

The mecca of the faithful is the great statue of Buddha at Kamakura, just outside the great seaport of Yokohama.

This is the Colossus of Japanese idols. It is fifty-four feet in height, made of bronze, and weighs 450 tons. The flat thumbnail alone is large enough to afford a seat for a weary pilgrim, and by means of a staircase inside, one can mount to a tiny shrine in the idol's nose.

Even into this worship comes the cherry blossom. White at the tea houses, scarlet robed girls are serving a tea made of cherry blossoms, devout men and women are putting garlands made of the blooms at the feet of the great idol.

It is cherry blossom time in religion as well as pleasure.

the tiny, doll-like girls, with their silks, their parasols, fans and mining from place to place to make their calls. Everywhere in the train comes the young men of the nation, paying assiduous if respectful court.

Such famous places of the cherry blossoms as Ueno Park, the bazaar of Mukojima, Noge Hill, in Yokohama, and the Cherry Banks at Koganei, are filled with the merry-makers. Joyousness is in the air. The famous Japanese mountebanks show their skill, at every corner is a little theater, all over the public squares are the famed Japanese wrestlers.

Along the roadways, an inch deep with the fallen petals, children draw their movable temples, a queer toy from the Occidental viewpoint, but one which seems eminently the proper one for the Jap youngster.

Sometimes in one long line can be seen perhaps a hundred little girls, dressed in all the gorgeousness of the Japanese silks, pulling on ropes attached to miniature chariots in which are seated little boys playing on musical instruments.

Then comes another form of procession, in which the most beautiful young woman of the town is crowned with cherry blossoms, drawn by retainers covered with the blossoms. Even the ropes by which the chariot is drawn are concealed by sprays of cherry blossoms.

Nature itself seems to harmonize and take mute part in this beautiful parade by every now and then sending a gentle breeze that stirs a shower of petals from the trees along the avenue.

Cherry blossom rejoicing probably attains its perfection at the capital, Tokio, and it is worthy of mention that while the recent successes in warfare and statecraft have impressively demonstrated to the world the ability of the Japanese to meet his Caucasian rivals