

Second Letter

October 6. 1874. All my pictures are now in shades and
deathbeds' pictures were poor - good where the wheels last, since our
Japan. Oct. 1874.

Dear Children - The ground good will come, but now I have time
to give you some details about our life in Japan. I wish I could give you a vivid picture of
childhood in Japan. As you go out upon the streets - those queer-
looking streets of Yedo or Yokohama - you are surprised at the
multitude of little folks & nearly every child you meet seems to be
double, or to have two heads. On looking closer however, you find
that one of the heads belongs to a child, generally a girl, eight or
ten years old & the other is that of a baby which is strapped upon
her back. It is in this way that nearly every infant is cared for.
It is simply fastened to the back of an older child, though it may
not be more than two months old & that child goes about her play
or walks the streets, scarcely conscious that a little living baby is
following her more closely than her shadow. In the fishing villages
where the children are about as familiar with the water as young
ducks are, these little nurses plunge in, baby & all; for as long as
head No. 1. is above the water little No. 2. has at least an equal chance.

But this introduction to life is pretty hard for the little one. To be
tossed & jolted about with its weak neck, & head nodding helplessly in
every direction; to have its sister's hair dangling in its face & eyes con-
tinually, with flies & mosquitoes trying to devour it & a hot sun blazing
upon its bare & tender scalps, all this is a pretty good test of endurance.
The baby who has passed this ordeal is prepared for any hardships
that life may present. When a child is from one to five years
old his head is shaved & the mother's fancy is displayed in the
little locks or patches of hair that are left remaining. These little tufts
may be seen on the sides of the head, like the winglets of a chicken, or the
fins of a fish, or they may be on the top, or the back of the head, cut in
square blocks, or in the shape of a leaf or a butterfly. Many of the boys as
they grow older are tattooed, or painted, on their backs & arms. Sometimes a
half-naked boatman has a blue dragon, or swan, extending over his whole back.

I would not attempt to give you the impression that Japanese children
are miserable in all respects, for that would not be true.
Childhood every where finds some amusement & contrives to get a
good deal of happiness out of its young fresh life.

The children of Japan have their amusements, though they appear
rather old, partly because they dress exactly like old people &
partly because there is more care & responsibility in carrying
a baby strapped to the back than there is in jumping the rope
or playing with dolls.

There are schools in Japan especially for the boys. I visited one which had desks for each boy & they were fearfully fastened with iron & were low, since the boys always sit upon mats on the floor. For the first year or two the little pupil does nothing but learn to write the Japanese letters & characters, with a coarse pen or brush. The next step is to learn a year or two in learning to read these characters. Now as you pass a school house you will hear all the boys reading at once with great noise & confusion.

The girls of the higher class are taught music as a chief accomplishment. But such music is never heard out of Japan. It is common for girls to sing with the accompaniment of a very rude guitar and they seem to aim at a sort of shrill kind of squeaking tone, which has more of the harshness of the banjo than the flute-like sweetness which is thought so desirable by us. And yet these Japanese children have naturally as much music in their voices as the children of America. Those who have been taught by the missionaries sing our Sabbath School tunes so well that the listener might fancy himself at home. What a blessed thing is the Sabbath School work on these mission fields! And what a grand influence is being exerted by our familiar Sabbath School hymns! Multitudes who have very little knowledge of salvation as yet, have been attracted by these sweet melodies as they have heard them in the schools or in the families. It is not uncommon for a crowd to gather round the doors & windows to listen to not only the music but the words some seem constantly to ring in their ears. You may hear little children on the street singing "Jesus loves me this I know" although they are healthy children who have never attended a mission school. And what is true in Japan is true in China & Persia, & Syria & India. The Sabbath School hymn & the Cabinet Organ have become great agencies in our time for the conversion of the world. How beautiful & encouraging the thought that the children of every land & race & color & tongue are already learning to sing the songs of Jesus & his love.

I could present you a sorry picture were I to tell you what the children of Japan worship when untaught by the missionaries. I think I will give you a brief sketch of what I saw in the great temple of Asakusa at Yedo. It is an enormous building of the pagoda style, with cornices extending many feet on every side. We found it 150 feet in each dimension & capable of sheltering 11000 persons. All its approaches are lined with little shops & stands for the sale of fruits & toys, images & every kind of small articles. Jugglers & sharp men and theatrical performers are there with every variety of device for gaining money from the crowd of worshippers & lighters.

Large flocks of doves & chickens are kept about the temple & the worshipers stop before entering to purchase a penny worth of rice, which they feed to these fowls in order to gain the favor of the idol which they are to worship. At each door post as you enter is a hideous image of the devil, ten or fifteen feet high & shut up in a cage. These are said to guard the entrance. Look closely between the bars & you will see that these huge figures are covered from head to foot with balls or wads of white paper, which the worshippers have chewed in school-boy fashion & thrown at them as they passed in. It requires some skill to make a good hit when throwing between the bars of the cages but if one can only make his ball stick to the face or breast of the old monster, it is a lucky omen, & he feels sure that his prayer will be answered in the temple. We are taught to resist the devil that he may flee from us, but the idea of insulting him with spitballs seems to us a little queer. I can assure that these grim old fellows, thus besmeared for years, present a very sorry appearance. The altar within, where the image of Buddha is set up, is surrounded with candles & trappings & incense & the smoke of incense, so that you might almost fancy yourself in a Roman Catholic Cathedral only that the image is of Buddha instead of the Virgin Mary. Near the altar is a wooden image of the god of healing. He is the prince of quacks, though he has made no fortune, but quite the reverse. The practice is for the patient to rub the idol & then with the same hand to rub himself. If he has headache he rubs the idol's head & then his own to so different parts of the body according to the locality of the disease. This practice has been continued for so many years that the poor idol has almost every trace of his nose & lips rubbed off, & a deep cavity is worn in the region of his stomach & lungs. Before the altar is a long box into which each petitioner throws a piece of coin as the first act of his worship, then standing or kneeling before the idol he gives a sharp tap of his hands, in order to call his attention. He then presents his petition & goes his way. Sometimes however, if his request is a very important one he writes it on a bit of paper, which he then fastens to some part of the altar or railing. Two things in the worship of these Buddhists are worthy of imitation. One is that they always accompany their prayers with their gifts or offerings. Another is their grateful acknowledgment whenever they suppose that their prayers have been answered. You frequently see posted up in a temple the signatures of those who have gone back to record their testimony that Buddha had heard their prayers. They are like the one leper who returned to our Saviour & gave God thanks, while the ungrateful nine pulled on this way.

It was to my mind inexplicable that people, men, women & children, as they come & bow before this mere block of wood, some had come from a long distance in the country; each had trouble & angusties known only to himself, but he found no relief. Things sometimes happen according to their desires but no one of all the petitions ever offered to Buddha in Japan or elsewhere has received an answer.

Now I will tell you of another place I visited, in Yokohama, & that is the Hepburn's School. I went one Sabbath morning while the Sabbath School was in session to hear them sing. Miss Lily Hopper of Carlton led them a Cabinet Organ. The first thing that attracted my attention was about forty pairs of wooden sandals outside the door, for the Japanese never tread upon their clean mats with shoes. The exercises were very interesting & the singing was not inferior to that which we hear in America.

Let me close my letter by adding that it is in the power of the Sabbath Schools in America to gather under the banner of the cross & away from the heathen temples hundreds of just such groups as I saw that morning in Miss Hepburn's School from among the children of Japan.

Your sincere friend

F. F. Ellinwood.