

Second Letter

Japan. Oct. 1874.

Dear Childred

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 limp baby is following her more closely than her shadow. In the fishing villages where the children are about as families 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 continually, with flies & mosquitoes trying to devour it & a hot sun blazing upon its bare & tender scalp, 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 ropes or playing with dolls.

