

# Visiting Mlle. Butterfly



By Onoto Watanna



T may be that the lot of a Japanese woman as compared to that of other nations is a narrow one, but her girlhood at least is happy. Possibly she does not take too literally the precepts laid rigidly down for her sex in the books placed before her. The young American miss who omnivorously devours the popular novels of the day, would smile in disdain and amusement at the library of little Miss Butterfly. It consists of Woman's Great Learning, Woman's Small Learning, Woman's Household Instruction, Moral Lessons, Lady's Letter Writer, Rules

and Examples to secure perfect agreement between man and wife, and collections of classical poems.

Also, to-day, many girls read abridged and translated books by foreign authors. In fact, there is a new type of woman, who lives a much broader life, and takes full advantage of the modern opportunity for education and even travel. But even to-day, this class of girl is regarded more or less with curiosity, and a mixture of esteem and pity. Esteem because of their attainments, pity because, as a rule they are avoided by men, and to go through life husbandless and childless is, to a Japanese girl, the most cruel of all fates.

Vanity is fearfully frowned upon in "The Great Learning for Women." When a girl is beautiful the parents often keep no mirror in the house lest the truth of the proverb, "A looking-glass is the mind of a woman" be exemplified in their daughter. In fact, beauty of face is alleged to be a most despised possession. So the parents aver, anyhow.

"Beware of a beautiful woman. She is like red pepper," says one warning proverb, and there are hundreds of others equally adverse to woman's beauty. It's all very well for poets and artists to celebrate beauty; parents and philosophers and the honorable priests know better! Is it to be wondered at, therefore, that the poor little possessor of this dubious treasure supplicates the merciful gods to take it from her quickly, and hasten the steps of age! Indeed, far from flattering a girl by telling her she is pretty, you are apt to offend mortally, or at any rate hurt her sensitive feelings.

"The world is just as a person's heart makes it." So, within the narrow confines of her home, Miss Butterfly finds contentment.

#### PARENTS GUARD HER

It is a mistake to regard the little mousme so much in evidence to the globe trotter, as typical of Japanese girlhood. She is no more so than the French grisette represents the French girl. The delicately reared Japanese girl is not loosely in evidence in the streets of the open ports. She is far too precious to appear at all in public life, save in court circles and diplomatic society. The average young girl of good family in Japan, however, is sheltered and guarded in her home as carefully to-day as she was in feudal times.

Even in babyhood, she learns the science of deportment. How to walk gracefully and modestly, how to kneel, arise, place her hands upon her knees, and bow.

While she is still a very little girl, she is taught how to wait upon people. This is an art by no means to be despised. To hold the tray properly, present it gracefully, pour the tea and pass the cup—all this calls for daintiness and charm. Many a meal has been spoiled and the viands rendered unappetizing by the

clumsy service of an untrained girl. Mothers take the greatest pains to instruct their daughters in this most delicate of tasks, and no matter how rich the family, the daughter waits upon her mother and the male members of the family.

Obedience is to Miss Butterfly the most important word in her vocabulary, just as duty is the watchword of her brother; but though amiably willing to wait upon her brothers, she is by no means their slave, despite the statement that even her baby brother may set his imperious little foot upon her neck. I'm afraid if he actually attempted to do this, Butterfly's little hand would administer a spanking he would not soon forget.

Her life is a full and a happy one. She has her little circle of friends, her household duties (even the richest girl has these) her amusements, even her charities.

Butterfly arises with the sun, and, as good humor is a virtue especially to be cultivated, she cheerfully salutes the Honorable Lord of Day with a smiling obeisance. A few minutes out in the open air, loitering in the pretty garden in the rear of the house, and, refreshed, at the outset of the day, she joins the little circle at the morning meal.

All greet her with smiling "Ohayos!" and a glance at their faces would show the estimation in which she is held by her family. Even her father's stern face relaxes as she hovers about him. Her mother leans upon her, knowing that Butterfly will take from her own slender shoulders all the burden of the day. Even the lordly elder brothers contritely beg her to "excuse my rudeness the last time we met," while the smaller ones press their cheeks to hers, a Japanese expression of affection almost as demonstrative as the western kiss. Indeed she is the life of the party.

Much as parents desire and pray for sons, a daughterless home is a dull and incomplete one. Who is there to wait upon the elder brothers and gently chide the younger ones? Who, solicitously, to serve the honorable Voice of Authority, to see that his honorable insides are filled, his honorable feet washed? The task nominally belongs to the Okusama (Honorable lady of the house, as the mother



MISS BUTTERFLY IN THE GARDEN

is called), but it is always the young daughter whose willing little feet carry her back and forth in service.

#### A QUEEN IN THE HOME

Whatever her lowly position in popular estimation, in the bosom of the family she is really a little queen, and often a tyrant. The American girl who smoothes and pets her papa's bald pate in an effort to loosen his pursestrings has her prototype in the Japanese girl who solic-

itously keeps her honorable father's rice bowl filled, places the appetizing (!) wriggling live fish upon his plate before him, and repeatedly fills and refills his one-whiff pipe, only in the end to breathe her modest request for a new obi fourteen feet long and fourteen inches wide.

Or, maybe, Butterfly wishes to make a little journey. She does not indifferently or defiantly announce her intentions to her father, as Miss America sometimes does. She has more insidious methods



PLAYING THEIR FAVORITE GAME



HUNTING FOR FLOWERS



"HER LITTLE CIRCLE OF FRIENDS"



for obtaining his willing consent and often company. Chichi (papa), she knows, is, like all Japanese, an admirer of nature, and despite his weighty business affairs, at heart, a poet. So Miss Butterfly beguiles him with dreamy talk of the plum trees in the temple gardens, and, as she fixes his final cup of tea exactly right, she tells him innocently of friends and neighbors she has seen sporting themselves under the trees, and of the happy picnickers already traveling toward the hills.

The mother, always a confidante, and sometimes a fellow conspirator, adds a gentle word or two, and, presently, paterfamilias sighs, puffs meditatively upon his pipe, which is assiduously kept filled and lit by Butterfly, and is induced to tell the insignificant females of his family of certain picnics he has made in his time. He loves to discourse upon the white sails of returning junks, the evening bells of Kamagawa, the teahouses of Iro. Ah! a picnic under the plum trees,

and later the leisurely happy return under the light of a full moon!

It is Chichi who suggests—nay, orders—the women of his household to make immediate preparation for such an excursion. Butterfly is delightedly surprised at the suddenness of his whim, but, of course, she and her little complacent mamma instantly hasten to obey his honorable commands.

As there is no furniture in a Japanese house, the housework is very light, and the chores are done by servants. Even poorer people keep a scullery maid or boy, and the richer families employ a great many servants.

Butterfly, however, be she ever so rich, is not allowed to grow up in idleness. There are very many tasks to keep both her hands and mind busy, especially during the morning. There are the large wadded quilts (*futon*) under which the family sleep to fold and put away in their recesses. The *amado* (verandah walls), must be rolled into their grooves



IN THE MUSIC ROOM



to admit the morning sun, and while this task is generally done by the maids, Butterfly assists or directs them. Indeed, very few servants can be trusted to do their work without intelligent supervision either by the Okusama or Miss Butterfly.

#### LOVES TO DO HOUSEWORK

With her head bound about with a figured dust towel, her sleeves tied to the elbows, her skirts tucked up securely, Butterfly often wields the bamboo broom. This is a fairly light task—so different from American sweeping, with its attendant cloud of dust and dirt. The Japanese take as scrupulous care of their padded floors as they would of a bed—and, indeed, it is their bed. Shoes and clogs being removed before entering the house, the filth and dirt of the streets and highways are left outside. Nevertheless, Butterfly daily sweeps vigorously away at the shining matting, even if it be only at imaginary dust!

Now the hearth must be made immaculate, and few housewives care to entrust this important task to a servant. Butterfly takes pride in polishing the beautiful hibachi till it glows. Girls of a family love to gather about the hibachi, and take turn in polishing it, laughing and chattering the while. It is a deep copper lined vessel, which serves the capacity of both tobacco-box and hearth, if such one might call it. It can be a very beautiful and costly article, according to the family's resources, and is made of copper, brass, iron, and sometimes even of wood, lined with copper. With the exception of one other, the polishing of the hibachi is the most pleasant of Butterfly's tasks.

The favorite one with all girls is the placing of the flower of the day, and changing the ornament in the tokonoma (place of honor), which is in every Japanese house, however humble. This is a far more serious task than would seem at first thought. No Japanese

would hurriedly choose and place a flower. It takes much thought, and discussion with the Okusama, and even the advice of the father is sometimes sought.

First of all, Butterfly is despatched into the garden, or the fields, as the case may be, to secure the desired flower or branch. She does not gather a bunch of flowers at random. In her opinion, and in that of all Japanese, flowers look lovelier growing, and it is wicked to thus wantonly slay them for the adornment of the house. Butterfly picks but one single flower with perhaps a reed, or little feathery branch to accompany it. She chooses very carefully, and takes a great deal of time before she decides which flower shall be the one for that particular day. It must measure up to the desired standard, and, even in winter, when there are nothing but little leafless twigs to pick, or a branch of fir or pine, its shape must be both pleasing and artistic.

The flower plucked, Butterfly, with great care and concern, places it in the vase.

The Japanese are often likened to children, because of their fondness for games. Butterfly is particularly fond of battledore and shuttlecock, and plays it when the sun begins to disappear and the cool twilight comes. As she runs about, chanting the numberless little

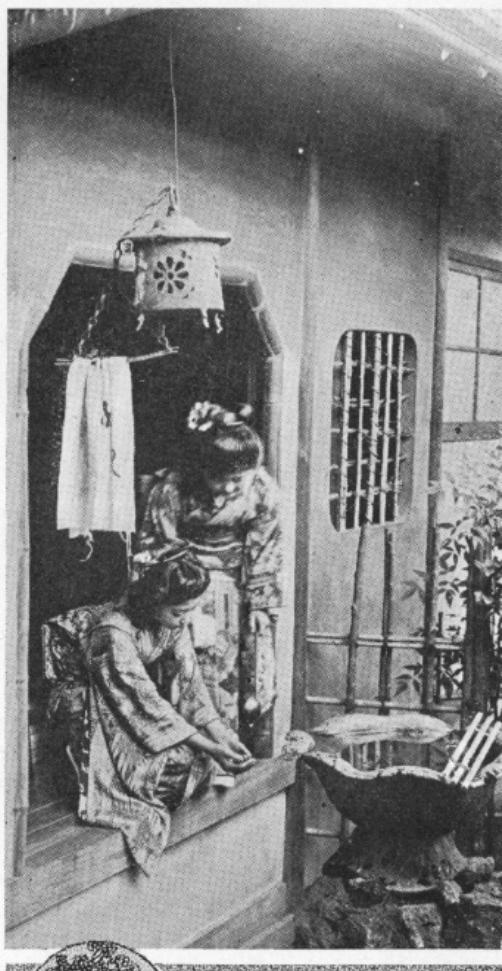
songs that go with the game, she makes an exquisitely pretty picture, upon which the sinking sun seems to linger regrettably. Her arms are bare, where the sleeves have been tied to her elbow, her kimono is tucked up to her waist, revealing the scarlet petticoat beneath. Apropos of this scarlet petticoat there is a proverb peculiarly sad when analyzed: "Love leaves with the red petticoat!" (which belongs to youth).

The better class families have their homes in the country or the suburbs, though when the father has a business in the city they often maintain a city house also. The girls, however, are kept in the country, wherever it is possible.

In the country her seclusion is not drastically insisted upon. She roams at will through the fields and hills and valleys, with perhaps only an attendant maid or chaperon; or she drives abroad through the pleasant country, flower viewing, mountain view-

ing, studying the clouds, the sky in its various aspects, and, at night, upon her little balcony, the stars and moon. All Japanese girls are given to star-gazing. They will spend hours at the time, seemingly entranced.

On certain days, Butterfly is taken with her mother to pay formal calls upon friends and neighbors. Sometimes she does not alight from the jinrikisha,



IN THE ALCOVE



When she is permitted to enter the house with her mother, she does not join in the conversation, though she listens very attentively, and, by her amiable, smiling attitude of attention, shows that she is an intelligent and appreciative listener.

Unlike Miss America, she would not dream of interrupting or correcting her honorable mother, nor does she offer her insignificant opinion concerning any matter under discussion. Very fearful proverbs have been erected for her especial benefit concerning the vice of talking:

"The tongue three inches long can kill a man six feet tall!"

"A bad report runs one thousand ri."

"The fly seeks out the diseased spots" (for scandal), and so forth.

#### SILENCE INDEED GOLDEN

With these warnings before her, Butterfly cultivates the art of silence. To talk little, but listen sympathetically—that is her forte. Her very presence by her mother's side restrains that little lady from yielding to the temptation to gossip or tell a bit of scandal.

When there are girls of her own age in the family, Butterfly joins them in their rooms, or they wander out together into the gardens or fields. Now her spirits break out unchecked. Her merry laughter, and little chattering tongue bear evidence to the fact that Butterfly is not by any means a mute. Still, she does not laugh or chatter noisily, or play boisterously, as that is considered vulgar, and Butterfly is a refined product.

Though ordained by fate in the persons of her parents to marry a youth she may seldom (and sometimes never) have seen, do not for a moment suppose that Miss Butterfly is to be robbed of her romance. She is even more sentimental than girls of other lands. Everything has to her a meaning, a significance. To suppress emotion is but to deepen its power. Miss Butterfly, rigidly and carefully guarded, dreams of the hero who is certain some day to come into her life and claim her.

Sometimes she has contrived to see him, be it only through a little peep-hole in a friendly shoji. Sometimes, and when she breathes this secret into the greedy little ears of her friends they

thrill and exclaim in wonder and envy—she has actually flirted with him! She is a very wicked little girl, and a sly one, too; but, you see, it is a very easy matter behind your august parent's back, and as you pass in filial service upon him to wave a long sleeve coquettishly in the direction of the youthful guest seated opposite the Supreme Voice of Authority, or slightly move the hand, palm down.

These *may* be tricks worthy of a geisha, as your more scrupulous girl friends jealously declare. Still, youth is saucy, and bound to bubble over even if kept behind locked bars.

There are other ways, too, of flirting in Japan. They are strictly prohibited, of course, by all good mothers, but are said to be practiced nevertheless. Such as, for instance, twitching the corner of the mouth very slightly, and drooping the lids demurely down.

Ah! Miss Butterfly knows a trick or two, despite her mouselike, innocent demeanor. It is not always her fault if quite wonderful little epistles of love and poems do not find their way into the secret recesses of her sleeve.

#### REJECTING THE SUITOR

Time was when the Japanese youth, who always falls in love at sight, would fasten the branch of a certain shrub to the house of the adored one. If it were taken in, the lovelorn suitor knew that he was accepted. If it were neglected, or worse luck, cruelly cast aside, then the unfortunate swain was made aware that his suit had been rejected. This mode is still practiced in remote country regions, I am told.

This barbaric method of courtship was much admired by the Japanese girl, for, in that rude way, she knew the heart of her lover. It is very difficult and sad for Miss Butterfly now to know whether she is the choice of the youth himself or of his family. She tries very hard to learn all about him, and often the tales that reach her ears make her little heart heavy. Alas! she has heard he has been a frequent visitor of the fascinating geisha houses. What charms has she, poor little, secluded Butterfly, with her dolls, her birds, her flowers and chins, to offset the alluring ones of the joy-girls, and, maybe, there is but scant comfort in the

thought that while the Geisha has been bred to give men delight, she has been reared to elevate, ennable, comfort him.

However, loving parents choose wisely the husbands for their daughters, and his character is put under a rigid microscope before final arrangements are made. It is absurd to suppose, as some writers have declared, that Japanese girls are practically sold to their husbands, regardless of his character. Parents prefer a very youthful husband to an older one. It is hardly likely that they yield up their most cherished possession without knowing fully into whose hands she is to be entrusted. In fact, happy marriages are far commoner in Japan than unhappy ones.

Although Butterfly is not consulted at the period when her parents decide to choose for her a husband, she knows exactly what is in progress. What the mother has not been induced to tell her, she learns by various other means, and she is not at all above eavesdropping, and listening and spying at every available peephole in the shoji. Can you blame her?—with her life's happiness at stake? Anyway, a secret of this sort is impossible to keep. The Voice of Authority is honorably loud, the walls are of paper, and Butterfly has the most acute of ears. Besides it is in the very air about her—this contemplated wedding. Mother's eyes show traces of night tears, father is more affectionate, brothers less exacting and teasing. The very maids smile knowingly among themselves, and stop their whispers at her appearance. It is through them she learns that a certain distant relative is going back and forth as Nakoda (matchmaker) between her father's house and that of a certain youth. During this period her seclusion is very sternly and strictly enforced, and she scarcely ventures forth at all. Her days are full of excitement, however, as she marks the progress of the negotiations.

There comes a day when she is solemnly called before her honorable parents, and her betrothal announced to her. Now she must prepare for the formal-look-at meeting. She becomes suddenly sobered, panic-stricken often. Even if she has already met him, the look-at meeting is a trying, torturing event. All

her naughtiness, giddiness, bravado drops from poor little Butterfly. She is overcome with embarrassment, shyness. On the dreaded day itself, she does not dare to even raise her head to look at the youth seated so close beside her, save, timidly, when requested by her father to exchange wedding gifts with him.

There follows very thrilling days of preparation, and often, where the parents are lenient, the young couple are given opportunity to speak with each other, to take a little walk into the woods, though they are always attended by chaperon or mother. All Butterfly's dreams seem now to be coming true. These are the happiest moments of her life!

But, alas! there comes a day, when, fearfully, Butterfly enters the house of the dread parent-in-law. Not even the fond look of assurance of her husband, nor his furtive pressure upon her little hand, can help her now. In her sleeve she carries a little scroll, and on this are enumerated the causes for which she may be divorced:

1. If she be disobedient to the parents-in-law.
2. If she be barren.
3. If she be lewd.
4. If she be jealous.
5. If she have some loathsome illness.
6. If she steal.
7. If she talk too much.

Mother has put the scroll into her hands on the night before the wedding. It has frightened her quite mute. The castle dreams she has reared seem destined to crumble cruelly to pieces. Her chief and only aim now must be to propitiate and please the august mother-in-law. This will require tact, patience.

Having won the approval of her husband's parents, and, in secret (it would never do to let a possibly jealous mother see that her son is partial to his wife) her lord's love, Butterfly now claps her hands daily before the gods to attract their attention, and, making ingratiating offers and promises, beseeches them to make her quickly a mother. Elevated to this honorable position, she goes into a house of her own, and awaits complacently that wonderful time when she too will occupy the position of the autocratic mother-in-law!