

THE JAPANESE FLORAL CALENDAR.

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XI. THE CHRYSANTHEMUM,

AS we stated previously, the chrysanthemum, in Japanese calendars, generally belongs to the ninth month (o. c.), or October. This is probably due to the fact that the fifth great festival, the *Kiku no Sekku* (Festival of the Chrysanthemum) fell on the ninth day of the ninth month (o. c.), or toward the end of October. But we took the liberty to change that order, simply because the Emperor's birthday comes on November 3, and the sixteen-petalled chrysanthemum has been for a long time the imperial emblem. Moreover, the annual Chrysanthemum Garden Party, given at one of the imperial palaces, falls in November. The difficulty in harmonizing the two calendars (old and new) arises from the fact that the ninth month of the old calendar covers portions of both October and November.

The chrysanthemum blossoms are of various shapes, sizes, and colors; but, according to Mr. Conder, "the yellow kind ranks first." It is, in fact, said that there are almost 300 different shades of color in about 800 varieties of chrysanthemum raised in Japan. One can find, moreover, "gigantic flowers, microscopic flowers, plants of single [huge] blossom, and single plants of 200 [600 to 700] blossoms."* In November, 1902, in the Imperial Gardens, Tokyo, there was one plant with 1272 blossoms, each $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter! And one of the great curiosities of the chrysanthemum season is, of course, the view of living pictures" at such a place, for instance, as Dango-zaka in Tokyo. This is the Japanese esthetic variation of the Occidental prosaic wax-works.

The chrysanthemum and the fox are commonly associated ideas in art and literature on account of an old tale to the following effect, as related by Dr. Griffis: "A fox, assuming the form of a lovely woman, bewitched a certain prince. One day, happening to fall

* Miss Scidmore's *Jinrikisha Days in Japan*.

asleep on a bed of chrysanthemums, she resumed her normal shape. The prince, seeing the animal, shot at him, hitting the fox in the forehead. He afterward saw that his concubine had a wound in



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the corresponding part of the head, and thus discovered her true nature."

The chrysanthemum is also associated with the crane.

On the occasion of the Chrysanthemum Festival, it was customary to wear a special dress, called *Kiku-gasane*, purple outside and white inside; to drink *kiku sake*, or *sake* with chysanthemum dipped in it, as a specific against malaria; and to compose poems, for which, in court circles, the Emperor chose the subject. This festival has been practically merged into the Emperor's birthday.*

In the "One Hundred Poems" there is only one reference to the chrysanthemum, as follows:

THE FROST'S MAGIC.

If it were my wish
 White Chrysanthemum to cull;
 Puzzled by the frost
 Of the early autumn time,
 I perchance might pluck the flower.†



CHRYSANTHEMUM VENDER.

Another old poem, of which we have not found the Japanese original has been translated as follows:‡

"Looking upward to the palace garden, long I gaze and wonder what they are, whether white and snowy petalled chysanthemum, or the twinkling lustre of the stars."

* "Let the Emperor live forever. May he see the chrysanthemum cup go round autumn after autumn for a thousand years!"

† Translation by Prof. Clay MacCauley.

‡ *The Far East*, Vol. II, No. 11.

The chrysanthemum has a great many very fanciful names like "star-like flower," "flower of a thousand generations," "younger brother of the flowers," "old man's flower," "virgin flower," etc. The chrysanthemum is also one of the "Four Gentlemen," so called on account of their vigorous qualities,—the plum, the orchid, the bamboo, and the chrysanthemum.

But in Japan there is one place where it is said to be unlucky to raise chrysanthemums, that is, in Himeji. The reason therefor will be evident from the following story, related by Lafcadio Hearn in his *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan*:

"Himeji contains the ruins of a great castle of thirty turrets; and a daimyo used to dwell therein whose revenue was one hundred and fifty-six thousand koku of rice. Now, in the house of one of that daimyo's chief retainers was a maid servant of good family, whose name was O-Kiku; and the name 'Kiku' signifies a chrysanthemum flower. Many precious things were entrusted to her charge, and among other things ten costly dishes of gold. One of these was suddenly missed and could not be found; and the girl, being responsible therefor, and knowing not how otherwise to prove her innocence, drowned herself in a well. But ever thereafter her ghost, returning nightly, could be heard counting the dishes slowly, with sobs: '*Ichi-mai, Ni-mai, San-mai, Yo-mai, Go-mai, Roku-mai, Shichi-mai, Hachi-mai, Ku-mai, . . .*'

"Then there would be heard a despairing cry and a loud burst of weeping; and again the girl's voice counting the dishes plaintively: 'One—two—three—four—five—six—seven—eight—nine—'

"Her spirit passed into the body of a strange little insect, whose head faintly resembles that of a ghost with long disheveled hair; and it is called O-Kiku-mushi, or 'the fly of O-Kiku'; and it is found, they say, nowhere save in Himeji. A famous play was written about O-Kiku, which is still acted in all the popular theatres, entitled *Banshu-O-Kiku-no-Sara-Ya-shiki*, or 'the Manor of the Dish of O-Kiku of Banshu.'"

Some declare that *Banshu* is only a corruption of the name of an ancient quarter (*Banchō*) of *Tōkyō* (*Yedo*), where the story should have been laid. But the people of Himeji say, that part of their city now called *Go-Ken-Yashiki* is identical with the site of the ancient manor. What is certainly true is that to cultivate chrysanthemum flowers in the part of Himeji called *Go-Ken-Yashiki* is deemed unlucky, because the name of O-Kiku signifies "chrysanthemum." Therefore, nobody, I am told, ever cultivates chrysanthemums there.