

BAUMLUT.

Now that the long, long winter has faded into the distance and summer has come with a rush, hundreds of Dresdeners are making their pilgrimage to Cossebaude to see the *Baumblut*, for field after field contains row upon row of cherry trees, all a mass of beautiful white, fragrant blossom. Far away on the other side of the world thousands of people are doing the same thing, but there the merry little folks are even more enthusiastic, for their admiration of the cherry blooms amounts almost to worship. There is no more beautiful sight in the world than the cherry trees in Uyeno Park in Tokio in spring. From the wild seedling of the mountain cherry have been developed countless varieties, and many of the *sakura* trees are literally smothered in pink double blossoms as large as roses. The wide lotus lake below Uyeno reflects the wondrous sight and the temple roofs on the tiny islands are a mass of pink branches. The Japanese are in love with their cherry trees and countless poems have been written in its honour. While the blossoming of the cherry in Uyeno Park is made a festival for the well-to-do classes, it is followed a few days later by the celebration of the Mukojima, an avenue, more than two miles along the East bank of the Sumidagawa, lined with double rows of cherry trees. Hither come the poor of Tokio in their thousands, in boats, jinrikishas or on foot, shouting, singing, clapping and strumming the samisen, the gayest and most light-hearted crowd in the world. In Kyoto, Japan's older capital, the celebration of the cherry festival is an even more solemn event, and the quaint theatre is crowded nightly for three weeks in April by natives and foreigners anxious to witness the *Myako Odori* or cherry dance. And a most unique experience it is, of which we may venture to give a short account. A year or so ago the writer, with a party of friends, was present at this festival. On arriving at the theatre we were somewhat relieved to find that the removal of boots was not on this occasion a necessity, as large cloth shoes were provided, and with these on our feet we were ushered into a room bare of furniture save for a row of black lacquered stools which were placed all round the walls. This was not the room where the dance was to take place, but an ante-room, in which there was to be a ceremonious tea drinking. The seats were only placed against three sides of the room, and against the fourth wall was a sort of square table-box arrangement, and no sooner had we seated ourselves than a geisha girl, attired in a wonderful costume of the stiffest possible silk, her face painted, and even with long star-like rays of white paint on her neck, shuffled slowly with great dignity into the room and seated herself, or rather knelt and sat back on her heels in front of this box, after many ceremonious bows to us. Then three tiny little girls in brilliant red brocade kimonos toddled in and gave to each of us a plate of some yellow ware and a couple of chopsticks, and then departed and came in again bringing to the stately lady the ingredients for the tea-making, a tea-pot, some powdered tea, some hot water, and a large jar of cold water to cool it in, for Japanese tea may not be made with too hot water. The making of the tea took a very long time, and seemed to require very slow, graceful and deliberate gestures on the part of the maker, but at last it was ready, and the little dots of attendants by degrees brought to each one of the guests in turn a cup of the somewhat nauseous, green, lukewarm beverage, accompanying the presentation with a very deep bow, which we endeavoured to return, as gracefully as possible, no easy task for those seated cross-legged on the floor for lack of stools. Once more the tiny waitresses appeared with plates of little square sugared cakes, with more bowing, and then the tea maker, having herself bowed almost to the ground, drank a cup of her own brewing, and solemnly shuffled out, leaving us to realize the difficulty of manipulating a rather hard cake with chopsticks. Having with sundry grimaces drunk the tea, we were led into the large hall, in the gallery of which seats were provided for the poor foreigners who needed so Western a luxury. The floor of the hall was crowded with Japanese girls and men; the stalls, or rather the space they would occupy in a Western theatre, being mere floor, whereon the aristocracy of Kyoto were squatting, behind them being standing room for the lower classes. Along either side of the room ran a stage, about five feet broad, in front of a curtain, these side platforms leading on to a fairly deep stage, which faced us and was provided with shaded candle-footlights. At the stroke of a bell the side curtains lifted, disclosing on the right eight little girls each with a "samisen"—a three-stringed, square-ended banjo, played with an eight-inch long spade-shaped ivory plectrum,—and on the left eight more little girls, four of whom had small side drums and four tom-toms, shaped like hour-glasses, and played with the fingers. All these little girls were attired in gorgeous scarlet and light blue kimonos, heavily embroidered with gold, and as soon as they struck up the music, a weird

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monotonous kind of chant in a minor scale of five notes, accompanied by the "samisens", hour-glasses and side drums,—the posturing of the holders of the drumsticks was alone worth witnessing—from the corners of the room beneath us gradually appeared thirty two more little girls, sixteen on either side, who slowly danced or shuffled up the steps on to the side stages. These geisha dance with their arms, not feet, with which they only shuffle along; in their left hands they held fans, their attire being the same as that of the orchestra, and by degrees the whole thirty two little girls arrived on the central stage where they continued for a while their posturing, when they solemnly shuffled off through doors at either side of the stage proper. After a couple of minutes pause, during which the scenery was changed, a back cloth being drawn up, the weird monotonous music recommenced and they appeared again. Followed more posturing, for dancing in our sense of the word it certainly was not. Three times did this occur, and each time was the scenery changed, until finally there was a big deep stage in front of us, and in the last scene the girls appeared, having discarded their fans, with large branches of cherry blossom in their right hands, and after a final series of postures, during which the orchestra played with redoubled vigour, the dancers slowly shuffled off along the side stages, the way they came, the side curtains were dropped, and the show was over. Although, of course, we could not understand a word of it, the singers were declaiming the words of the drama,—for drama it was more than dance,—the whole time, and different as it was from anything we could see in a theatre at home, the quaintness, the grace of the whole performance was such, that we would not have missed it for anything. It seemed in a way to be a good illustration of one side, at all events, of Japanese character: their innate love of natural beauty, for who else among nations would deem it worth while, or even sane, to hold a quasi-religious festival,—for such the "Myako-odori" really is,—in honour of the sheer beauty of the exquisite pink of the cherry blossom. Imagine the Somerset farmer holding such a festival in honour of the apple blossom, instead of holding, as he does in his rough uncouth way a festival of rejoicing for the eventual tangible result of that blossom, the cider. What other nation would cultivate the cherry, not for its fruit,—for we were told that in their season even, cherries are far to seek,—but for the blossom, and the feast of colour afforded by groups or rows of trees laden with their pink petals.

MODERN OCEAN TRAVEL.

On the new S. S. "Kronprinzessin Cecilie" the North German Lloyd Co. are introducing a remarkable innovation which will considerably enhance the comfort of passengers, and be welcomed by them with much applause. Hitherto the table d'hote system has prevailed on board ocean liners i. e. the passengers have all dined together at long tables, the dinner being announced by a fanfare of trumpets. On the "Kronprinzessin Cecilie" there is to be a regular restaurant. The first-class dining saloon instead of long tables is to contain 76 round tables for two, five or seven persons, while larger rectangular tables are to be found at sides of the saloon only. Dinner will no longer be served to all passengers at the same time, but will be obtainable for several hours, at any time during which a passenger will be able to come and go as he likes, just as in a restaurant in a large city. One will be able to arrange to dine in a small but jovial circle at any hour without having to fear that one may be disturbed by the solemnity of a table d'hote. On the other hand those to whom a noisy meal in common is anathema can dine in peace by themselves. At the same time one will not be obliged to dine from a fixed series of courses but can order anything that takes one's fancy à la carte. The same arrangements will be made for breakfast and luncheon or for dinner. The price of the tickets for the passage remains unaltered and the passengers will not have to pay anything extra for dining à la carte.

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SAVED BY HORSES.

The pair of horses in a gentleman's brougham saved their owner from being murdered the other night near Berlin. The gentleman in question, a certain Herr Schlierecke, was driving along the Berlin road towards Muneburg in the early evening, when a man stepped in front of the carriage and presented a revolver at the coachman. He fired once, but missed, and the horses plunged, one of them knocking his arms as he was trying to fire again, with the result that the bullet struck one of the horses in the neck. The assassin had great difficulty in getting out of the way of the horses, which then rushed madly along the road towards Muneburg, until the one that had been shot in the neck fell exhausted from the effect of its wound.