



**N**EW YEAR'S day among the Japanese is not only the day that begins a year, but it is, in the highest sense of the words, le jour de l'an—their "day of the year." Preparation for it begins early in December. The American Christmas shopper, if landed in Tokyo in mid-December, would find crowds of her brothers and sisters in spirit thronging in shops decorated with the most attractive symbolic ornaments and displaying with great skill the things most requisite for the coming holiday time. At night, along the thoroughfares, the stranger would see multitudes crowded about street booths to purchase the wares exposed there, all which are significant of the New Year festival, and nothing else. Everywhere the avenue and by-ways would be illuminated with rows of shining lanterns, bearing trade devices and family crests, all suspended from the low eaves of stores and houses. Never are the streets of Japanese cities and towns so enlivened with gayly dressed crowds and busy traffickers as during the time of our own alien, yet kindred, Christmas excitement.

The specific preparations for the New Year begin about the thirteenth of the last month. Then, within every house in the empire, a general cleaning up takes place. A fresh, green branch of the bamboo tree, with its leaves and twigs to symbolize good fortune, is used as a duster in completing the thorough sweeping. At this time the soft rice mats of which the flooring in Japanese homes is made are renewed in order that the callers at the New Year may be received where they can enjoy a spotless footing. At this time, too, all matrons and maids are busy getting ready for wear on New Year's day kimonos that shall have no trace in them of the vanished past. To old and young the daily theme of thought and talk is the coming "New Year," full as much as "Christmas" is to us.

Outside the houses symbolic decoration has full sway, and transforms the thoroughfares into gayly colored and evergreen avenues. The treeless streets are turned, for the time being, into vistas of swaying bamboo and pine trees. Before each house entrance, according to the tenants' purses and taste, stands a kind of archway. Its pine branches, supposedly male and female, on the right and left, and the tall triple bamboo shafts (both trees symbolic of longevity that is of a hardness that has borne the storms and struggles of long life into a rugged old age) welcome the visitor. Over head, spanning the space between these uprights of the arch, is a decorated rope always of rice straw, having on it various pendants arranged in series of seven, five and three (lucky numbers). The rope recalls one of the most revered and poetic traditions of the Japanese past. The sun goddess, the ancestress of the imperial house of the empire, was angered with her brother in the ancient days, and in revenge hid herself in a cave. Darkness then prevailed in heaven and over the earth. The gods, in their perplexity, tried to induce her to come out of her hiding place. But in vain did they appear, until, in a dance they had arranged, she was induced by a taunt that touched her vanity to open the door of her self-chosen dungeon. One of the gods then drew her forth, and to prevent her running back into the cave, stretched a straw rope across the entrance. The perpetual shining of the sun, secured thereby, remains memorialized in the garlanded barrier hanging above each Japanese portal at New Year's time.

Among the most noticeable and significant objects ornamenting these doorway arches is a scarlet lobster, embedded among some branches of a bush whose old leaves remain unshed until after the young leaves have budded. The lobster's crooked body tells of old age bent with years, while the bush branches around it show how parents remain even while children and children's children may come into being. In the same decoration fronds of fern are placed, whose pairs of leaves symbolize wedded life. The orange, whose color brightens the clustered symbols, bears a name which, as a pun, means "generations," and tells of family perpetuity. Seaweed is there, too, as a memorial of good fortune, commemorating also the prehistoric conquest of Korea by the Empress Jingo. Her troops were in danger of defeat because their horses on the Korean seashore were starving from lack of food. But, by inspiration, she ordered seaweed to be flucked from the waters of the beach and given to the horses, who then were so invigorated that they carried their riders to glorious victory. Gohel white hands of paper wave over the garlands of the doorway arches symbolic of the ancient offerings that have won the favor of "the myriad gods."

After busy weeks of preparation at last the closing day of the year comes. On New Year's eve the whole country is astral and every place that needs a light for use or beauty is brightened. All through that night the people stay out of bed to see the old year pass and to welcome the new. Merchants do not go to bed until the dawn of New Year's day. All the business accounts of the closing year must be settled that night, and in every sense of the word the year is begun afresh among those Japanese who are guided by the old social order. All things are made new. Bad luck, bad feelings, unsettled debts, are all to be done away with and a new chapter of life opened, filled with happy prospects. The complete renewal of old-fashioned Japanese life at the New Year is well shown in one of the names that the day bears, San Gan, "The Three Begin-

**WAS TOO PUBLIC FOR HIM**  
Mild Mannered Little Man Has Very Embarrassing Experience, on Street.

He was a mild mannered little man, short, with gray hair and spectacles. It was noon on Washington street, and as usual the crowds were shoving and pushing to get somewhere. The little man was trying to worm his way through the crowds.

A well-dressed woman accompanied by a small boy was mixed up in the crowd. She wanted to cross the street. The boy stopped to look in a window.

The lady reached down and grasped a hand, saying: "Take my hand, dear."

"Not right here on the public street," she was startled to hear some one reply.

Looking down she saw that she was clasping the hand of a very inoffensive little man, who seemed to be much confused and embarrassed.

"Sir!" said she, haughtily, "I don't want you; I want my son."—Boston Traveler.

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**To the New Year**

Oh child New Year, on whom the mantle falls Of the departing year, who leaves to thee, The labors, tasks, the duties and the calls Which are the heirlooms of the past, to be A precious trust the heritage of time, How will thou face the future all alone? How front the foes of sin, and vice, and crime, Which muster round with force and might unknown?

Take courage, child of time, be not dismayed, Equip thyself with faith and hope and love, And seek for strength and wisdom from above; With these to help thee, never be afraid, Go forth with gladness on thine untrod way, And strength will come to thee from day to day.

E. D. NALDER.

**To the New Year and the Old Friends**

The moon wanes pale in the sky, And the stars all blink for morn; The old year is to die, And the new year to be born, We have passed through the vale of tears, We have trod the journey long, We have shared our hopes and fears, We have shared our grief and song; And we've shared them all with our old friends, Our true friends, our few friends, And we'll drain anew to our old friends, The friends that are always true.

—Henry Christopher Christie, in Smart Set.

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