

# If Women Had to Wear Brown at 49!



Sweet  
Lightness  
Writing a Letter

## Suppose the Japanese Method of Revealing Age Were in Vogue in America

**S**UPPOSE it were customary for every woman to whom you were introduced to tell you her age! Imagine, for a moment, what a social pandemonium would prevail among the fair sex if an edict should go forth that every woman of 40, for instance, must garb herself in brown, and every woman of 50 in the somberness of black!

A woman's age! 'Tis a sacred subject—at least, in most countries. No man would dare ask a fair acquaintance how many winters had passed over her head, nor would any woman tread upon the sacred ground of this subject unwittingly. That is, in most lands where they are not meek and lowly. Yet there is a country where women have no compunction about telling a stranger how old they are; in fact, they indicate their age by colors and modes of dress; they virtually shout it from the housetops, as it were.

In Japan social law decrees that every woman, old or young, shall dress according to her age. As she advances from time she is a little mite in a beflowered kimono until she is elderly, the colors of her garments become more sober, more subdued. And, strangely, the great ambition of a woman's life there is to become old. She rejoices when she can wear plain black and cut the hair off her head. She does this when she is approaching three-score years.

Remarkably pretty are the soft flowing dresses these little Japanese women wear; in early life they disport nearly all the colors of the rainbow. Nothing is more charming to the eye than a bevy of these pretty young girls. No women in late life, perhaps, appear so funereal as the Japanese women when they have laid aside the gaudy livery of their youth.

**I**NTEREST has been aroused in the costumes of Japanese women by the recent dress reform which had its inception at the Woman's University, Tokio. At the request of President Naruse, of the institution, Miss Kara G. Smart, secretary of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, furnished designs for a "reformed dress," which combined good points of both the Occidental and Japanese costumes.

Of course, many of the fair ones of the Flowery Kingdom held up their trembling little hands in indignation and protest. Do away with the charming style of dress which makes the women so picturesque and which satisfies the eye so perfectly with a harmonious display of color! Miss Smart explained that it was not necessary, or even practicable, to supplant the graceful kimono. But she said this:

"The fact remains that the Japanese women and girls are demanding, and most emphatically, a change in their attire. And this change is bound to come sooner or later. They have asked to be helped in making the desired change, and it is for us to give them something that appeals to their common sense, that gives greater freedom of motion in their ever-increasing activity, that is becoming and also, to some extent, foreignized."

Nowadays a visitor to the Woman's University will see many young native women wearing the new costume which was devised. It is a sort of tailor-made suit, modified by the kimono



Woman of 40



An old woman of 60



A Beauty of 25 Painting by Shunsho Katsukawa



Mothers of 35



A Shopping Trip at 8 Years



Maids of 13 and 15

idea. It is quite sedate and sober looking. Fortunately for those who visit the Celestial Kingdom in a search for the picturesque, this dress has made little headway among the other women of the empire. Many persons, however, say the kimono will pass in Japan. The influence of European dress is already manifest, and the change, they tell you, is inevitable.

When a girl baby is born there is great rejoicing in a Japanese household. And the happiness of the mother's heart seems to glow in the gorgeous, highly colored garments in which the little stranger is clothed. Silks covered with embroideries of wondrous crushed flowers and grotesque dragons and weird animals are used in making the tiny dresses.

Some little girls wear dresses of pure white, beautifully embroidered. Until the age of 19 the brightest colors are displayed—dappled, mottled, variegated colors; dazzling, bewildering colors. And this gay dress, of course, just suits the bit of sunshine which it incloses.

Of the little Japanese girl, Miss Dorothy Menpes, the English authoress, writes:

"A baby Japanese girl is the most delightful creature you can possibly imagine. A radiant, happy, beautiful butterfly. She is rarely known to cry, and is rarely slapped. What mother could have the heart to touch so dainty a blossom as the child flower of this land, of flowers!"

"The little girl loves fun; she loves toys, sweets and tea in little cups; she loves to smoke, with a funny pipe made of brass and kept in her sleeve; and above all, she loves her big, round-headed doll."

### TOPE DOWN AT 12

At the age of 12 and 13 there is a toning of color. Many girls at this age wear dresses of pale gray or blue, marvelously embroidered, often with flowers or landscape views. Others wear a white fabric, printed with wreaths of bright flowers; or purple, pink and lavender fabrics, decorated with harmonious flowers.

From the age of 18 to 18 the sleeves of the kimonos are worn very long, usually measuring three feet. As they get older, year by year, the young women shorten the sleeves until they are but a little longer than the arm at 19.

At about 25 subdued cloths of pink, purple and bright brown are allowed, with embroideries much less gaudy than those worn before the age of 18. After 25, however, bright colors and decorations are relinquished forever, and striped fabrics are adopted.

A visitor to Japan who sees a woman in a striped fabric of brown, blue or lavender may know she has passed 25. This may be told definitely by the breadth of the stripes, which narrow each year, until the age of 30, when an extremely narrow stripe is adopted.

At this age a Japanese woman develops a desire to age quickly, and she makes her age conspicuous, too. When she is 35 the Japanese woman affects a dark brown or gray fabric. Perhaps the only spot of color may be a monogram in gold or embroidered silk on her sleeve or near her neck.

Should you meet one wearing a fabric of brown or blue in a fine cross-plaid you may know she is 45. At 50 she dons this, and finally adopts a plain, dark gray, very dark brown or black. She no longer wears any colors.

The costume of the Japanese women is not so complicated as one may suppose. There is but a slight difference in the clothing of women from those worn by the men. An apron, or short petticoat, is worn beneath the kimono. Sometimes two petticoats are worn. As the weather grows colder an extra kimono is adopted, and as the temperature goes down extra kimonos are added, to the number of six or eight. An obi, or belt, is wound about these.

To get married is the great ambition of most young Japanese girls. Perhaps it is to lure a lover that such gay colors are affected. Anyway, after marriage, the desire to bedeck herself in colors and ornaments wanes.

### 'COLORS FADE AS YEARS FLY

"Starting life as a butterfly child, gay and brilliant, she becomes sadder and sadder with each passing year," a writer observes. "The colors fade and become dull, until by the time she is a full-grown woman they have sobered down to almost Quaker hues."

"Directly she is a wife, her one ambition is to become old; it is almost a craze with her. She shows it in every possible way—in the way she ties her obi, the fashion in which she dresses her hair; everything that suggests the advance of the serene and yellow leaf she eagerly adopts."

As the Japanese woman grows older, not only does she adopt sober colors in dress, but she changes the mode of dressing her hair. At the age of 13 she ties up her hair, and until she is 40 wears a high and elaborate coiffure.

In her maidenhood and the early days of her married life she employs a hairdresser, who usually spends two hours in arranging the black tresses. To keep the large mass of heavy coils in place large pins are used. The hair is dressed with oil and bandoline, to hold it in place, and because of the extreme labor of dressing it is taken down only once a week.

So as not to disarrange it, the women sleep on a sleeping block of carved wood, shaped to fit the neck, instead of a pillow.

Up to the age of 25 large pins and combs of gold and tortoise shell are used. At the age of 30 white pins are adopted, merely spalled with gold or gilding, and at 40 plain shell or wood is used. When she has reached 50 years every woman cuts off her hair.

Should a woman's husband die before she is 50, and she intends to remain a widow and devote herself to the memory of the late lamented, she indicates this by cutting her hair.

Japanese women wear many ornaments. In these there is no significance, only small narrow rings, however, being worn in old age. Were one able to take a peep at her dainty little foot, a person might tell a Japanese lady's age by the color of her sandals. From 10 to 15 she wears red or purple shoes; from 20 to 30, blue or gray, and after 30, black or pearl-gray.