

1.

The Japanese Art.

By.

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### Japanese Art.

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# Japanese Art.

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The Japanese art in all probability originated from the Chinese art; we could scarcely expect any thing different. Japan is young in comparison with its neighboring country, China, which has stood as a nation of artists almost since the beginning of history. But it is distinctly understood that art was greatly modified in passing from nation to nation, and even while Japan was yet in its pupilage its national character was asserting itself. Its world wide renown lies in a people quick in perception, and possessing a marked imitative power, and it is their own national genius that has raised the standard of their art.

The origin of their art dates back as far as the tenth century, and in its infancy it was not without its many influences, Europe just then in its maturity, eastern Asia, China, all influenced it more or less, but it is the Japanese own individuality that people admire, and not a combination of the stern Greek with the Oriental. Japanese artists have such a keen perception of harmony <sup>which exists</sup> between the ornament and the subject for which it is to be used,

and it is recognized that the artistic <sup>beauty</sup> lies not in their drawings, (the exact copy of things and objects as they are), but the harmonious color effect is paramount, and its beauty obscures the incongruities of composition. The Japanese appear to have thoroughly grasped the true place of color in decoration of curving surfaces, patterns and colors are selected which the curvature makes stand out in all their beauty and delicacy. This people are not only masters of the clay for pottery, the marble for monuments, and paper for dresses, but many substances which citizens of this country have never heard of or seen.

The materials used for art wares, or worked upon is as follows:—Bronze, Gold, silver, Porcelain, Clay, China, Lacquer, Paint, Bamboo, Silks, and Metal and Paper. In metal the patriarchs never tire of making and ornamenting the sword, members of all classes spare no pains in making it an article of the highest artistic value, one might wonder why a nation christened the, "Land of great peace," should be interested in such a production, but thanks to the keen foresight of that nation the time soon came when they were all needed for the defense of their country, their life, and their liberty, against their intruding neighbor China.

Japan mastered the secret of making porcelain in the twelfth century, their porcelain differs from that of other countries in that it is of a pure whiteness, and finer in quality, <sup>and</sup> its glaze has a bluish tint. While this is one of the materials mostly widely used for household purposes, it is one of the most beautiful fresh from the hand of the artist, the colors used are black for outline, red, green, gold and blue, the decorations may be divided into two classes, the vitreous, in which the decoration is sparing and of the most careful execution, the unadorned purity of the ware gives it a natural beauty, decorations emerge into more elaborate designs, in which vines and flowers are strewn around in careless grace upon the vase, or animals stand out boldly in gold and red.

The artistic porcelain is much more elaborate, patterns are intricate, and richness of color prevails, Red, Blue, Green, yellow, and black, mingle in scenes in which appear, birds, figures, and flowers, surrounded by deep and delicate shaded borders.

Lacquer is a material obtained from the sap or gum, drawn by tapping, from the (Rhus Vernicifera), a tree native of the southern part

of Japan. The fine technical skill handling this, the finest material, and shaping it into graceful forms, and decorating it with carefully compounded colors of greatest beauty, the precious metals gold and silver are inlaid in this black material representing running vines, flowers and landscapes of the most delicate patterns.

The native Bamboo is used for all purposes, from the roofs of their movable dwellings down to their tea cups, the canes are used for their carriage, boats, bridges, cranes, mats, baskets, fans, in fact almost every article used in the household, and no paper known is like that of Japan, for variety, seventy different purposes for which their paper is used are recorded, paper is used extensively for their clothing, their houses are papered, the partitions made of movable screens are papered, paper tiling, fans and umbrellas and many kinds of the finest ornamented writing paper, napkins, and handkerchiefs, lace paper suited for ladies dress, which would outdo in richness and delicacy the finest silk point lace, with a purity peculiar to itself. The paper that we

Americans are best acquainted with, is the kind used for fans, umbrellas and napkins, and the articles may be considered quite artistically decorated, with birds, fishes, flowers, vines, scenery, and the queerly dressed Japanese, in every ridiculous, comical position known to a human being, but it is remarkable how much every line and drop of paint means, often times a very few rightly directed lines will make the figure or landscape stand out as boldly, as some of our best paintings entirely filled in.

A few of the many different subjects used in their art is as follows, Nature, sea, Mountains, Mythology, Rain, Wind, Gods.

Coast scenery, Emblematic Flora and Fauna, In all their subjects we find above all things a deep love and admiration for nature, they have a real fondness for the picturesque, even their gardens are laid out with the utmost care, and the artist need not travel far to find subjects with which to illustrate his work, dwarfed pine trees, tiny bamboos, a little rice field and meadow, a pebbled stream and lakelet stocked with carp and goldfish.

tortoises, flowering reeds, lotus flower, iris, and even the puny bridge, the miniature mountains, and ferate falls are always present. The Japanese artist seems to have solved the mystery of colors and caught the grace and life of the animal and vegetable nature, we find some charming glimpses of common life, animal fun and floral grace, the fancy of the artist is nimble and his imagination most fertile, he peoples the earth, atmosphere and sky with a multitude of beings, and it is evident that mythology in Japan, like that in Greece "furnishes the national soil for their arts whether expressed in Bronze, porcelain, colors, song, poetry, picture dance, pantomime, or romance." Their religion consisting of its very very great number of Gods, fire dragons, Gods of wind Gods of the rain, God of the weather, and many others, all furnishes numerous subjects for their art, and it is said that the religion Buddhism received its hardest blow from the artists, by placing their gods in horrid ridiculous comical positions.

No where do we find a country so small in area so rich in picturesque scenery as is Japan, their numerous mountains find an important

place in their art, especially are they ever ready to represent their sacred mountain *Fusiyama*. Griffé describes it thus, "afar off, yet brought delusively near by the clear air, sits the queenly mountain in her robes of snow, already wearing the mornings crown of light, and her forehead gilded by the first ray of the yet-unrisen sun, far out at sea, long before is described, and from a land of thirteen provinces the peerless cone is seen and loved." It seems to be their ideal of the beautiful in nature, and they never tire of admiring, glorifying, and representing it, they have painted, embossed, carved, and modelled it in all their wares. The picturesque coast line dotted here and there with its many islands, sixty thousand in all, its fine harbors, and splendid waterways, find an extensive use in their artistic work, so also do their many volcanoes, and frequent earthquakes.

There is few things which a Japanese artist loves to produce more than the almost every day occurrence, Rain-fall, and representing the Japanese just in the act of raising the artistically arrayed umbrellas, a distinguishable feature in their every day life, as the blazing sun or frequent showers makes this article a necessity at almost all times.

The wind is represented in very many different stages in its progress, and on many fields of action, from the gentle zephyrs blowing through the reeds and bamboo canes, to the great typhoon lashing the great waves against the broken coast, and sweeping with violence across the narrow continent, laying the vegetation close to earth, and twisting and whirling the individual and his apparel in every conceivable form. In no country are the flora more beautiful or more varied than in parts of Japan, due to its great rainfalls and rich soil of volcanic origin, the vegetation is almost tropical. Flowers, creeping vines, great trees, and almost every kind of vegetable grow in great abundance especially the emblematic flowers, such as the chrysanthemum, lotus, iris, lily, peony, plum blossoms, pinks together with falling leaves and climbing vines of every description used alone and in combination, and also in combination with the numerous animals of Japan, which form quite an important factor in decoration, their emblematic animals from the lion, tiger, monkey and fishes and sea dragons, down to the hare the rat and the mouse all have been used quite extensively in their art.

The most common factor in their art is the portrayal of the fowls of air, the crane, duck, pheasant, sparrow, meadow lark, the birds of brilliant plumage, such as the peacock, canary, and birds of Paradise, and humming birds in fact birds of every description are at home represented on all their various art material, whether on the wing, perched on trees, or sailing on the lake.

I admire Japanese art wares, some for their originality and simplicity, some for their quaint form, and some for the beautiful and intricate patterns, the skill of the workman displayed in accomplishing them, and others for the description and portrayal of life so near to ours yet so different.

In the past the world owes much to the artists of Japan, and it looks forward to a still brighter future, for has Japan not witnessed arts rise in renown, decay and pass away, while she kept on apace and is still advancing. May that nation ever contribute its share of industrial training and accomplishments to make a more highly developed civilization throughout the entire world.

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