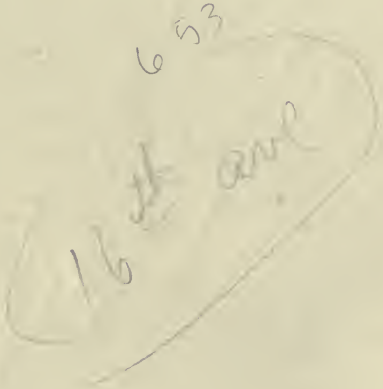
For out of olde feldes as men seith
Cometh al this newe corn fro yeer to yere
And out of olde bokes in good feith
Cometh al this newe science that men lere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From a print in ten colors by Suzuki Harunobu (1747–1818).

The Color-Prints of Old Japan

By

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THE COLOR-PRINTS OF OLD JAPAN.*

"What are they?" is a question often asked by those looking for the first time at a collection of Japanese prints. To say that they are chromoxylographs, is to give an answer strictly accurate. But as this is more concise than simple, it may be well to say in non-technical, popular language that they are prints in colors from engraved wooden blocks, as many blocks and impressions ordinarily being required as there are colors.

In Europe towards the end of the eighteenth century similar prints were produced, but as their reception by the public was not such as to encourage their makers, there was no development of the art comparable with that in Japan in the same century.

The Japanese name for these prints in general is *nishiki-ye*, but separate names distinguish the three principal kinds: the long narrow prints are termed *hachirakaki;* the large "broadsides" are *ichimai-ye;* and the smaller, more nearly square prints are *surimono.* Usually each broadside is an independent picture; but often two or three, and sometimes five, six, seven, or nine *ichimai-ye* must be united to get the whole design.

* A lecture accompanying an exhibition of prints held at Stiles Hall under the auspices of the Art Association of the University of California, February 7, 1901. (The lecture has been expanded somewhat and quotations and foot-notes freely inserted for the guidance of those wishing to read further on the subject.)

These prints were usually the result of the combination of the talents of three individuals; the painter, the engraver, and the printer generally being different persons. The painter drew the design in outline on a sheet of thin, semi-transparent paper, that was pasted face downwards on a slab of wood, usually cherry, cut with the grain, not across it, as are the blocks used by our wood-engravers. Having oiled the paper so that every brush-mark was plainly visible, the engraver carefully cut around the lines of the design with a sharp knife held in the right hand and guided by the left, and with small chisels removed the superfluous wood. After this outline-block had been washed to remove all paper, as many proofs were taken from it as there were to be colors in the finished picture, and on these the artist indicated his color-scheme. Each of these proofs was pasted on a block and a cut for each color made as before. In precisely the same places at the bottom of each were cut a right-angle and a short horizontal line to guide the printer in securing register.

The pigment was applied dry and was mixed and adjusted on the block with a broad, flat brush loaded with rice-paste. A dampened sheet of a tough, fibrous paper, made from the inner bark of the mulberry and admirably adapted for producing the most delicate effects, was then placed on the block, and the ink transferred to it by pressure with the *baren*, a flat disc of twisted paper rolled spirally and covered with a piece of the dried sheath of a bamboo sprout. Sometimes the ink was partially wiped from the block with a cloth or brush or the ball of the thumb, as is done by our printers of etchings, and what is termed a "gradation print" produced.

Ordinarily, as has been said, as many blocks and impressions are required as there are colors, and in some modern work, as the Kokkwa, the great art-work in which Mr. Ogawa of Tokyo is reproducing masterpieces of the various schools of Japanese art, the finished picture is said to be the result in some cases of no less than ninety

printings.* But in the old work new shades and tints were often produced by superimposing two or more colors, and Dr. Anderson states that "the effect of printing from two or more blocks was obtained in some cases by preparing a single block with ink of different colors."† Sometimes a deeply incised, uninked block was used to emboss certain parts of the design; waves, foliage, the patterns of cloths, and the folds of *kimonos* being thus treated. This is not as common in the *ichimai-ye* as in the *surimono*. These small prints were usually printed with greater care on a finer quality of paper, and were frequently given added richness by the use of gold, silver, and bronze powders, powdered mother-of-pearl, and flakes of gold leaf.

The method of printing seems to us slow and crude, but the results leave little to be desired. The impression is much more thoroughly under the control of the printer than in even the best of our machine-presses, and seldom is there a fault in the register. Much of the success of the finished picture depended on the care taken by the printer, and prints from the same blocks vary quite decidedly in value. The method of applying the ink to the block accounts for the fact that it is almost impossible to find two prints from the best period that are precisely alike: sometimes there is but a slight difference in the colors, sometimes the whole color-scheme is different.

Gradation-printing came into use comparatively late and is to be found mainly in the landscapes of Hiroshige and his imitators. A cheap, late print representing a huge fire burning in the foreground of a snow-clad landscape, is in this respect noteworthy. The column of smoke from the fire extends across three-quarters of the picture, and the gradual loss of density of the smoke as it rises is admirably represented: the red of the flames shades off into the gray smoke, so dense that the ridge of snow just back of the fire cannot be seen through it; the whiteness of the next

*Hill-Burton, M. R.: Photography and Color-Printing in Japan. International Studio, 5:250.

†Anderson, Wm.: Japanese Wood Engravings. London, 1895, p. 64.

ridge can faintly be perceived; the next is quite apparent, as is the distant cone of Fuji; the red glow of the sunset sky is also seen through the dark gray; and near the top of the picture the gradually deepening blue of the sky is visible through the gradually lightening gray of the smoke. Whatever may be its shortcomings otherwise, as a specimen of gradation-printing, the picture is a great success.

These color-prints first became known to Europeans generally in 1862. In the Japanese section of the International Exposition held in London that year, Sir Rutherford Alcock exhibited a small collection of rather late examples that attracted considerable attention. Mr. John Leighton made it the subject of a lecture at the Royal Institution that he later printed as a pamphlet and illustrated with a reproduction of a print by Kunisada. In the same year a number of artists resident in Paris—Stevens, Whistler, Diaz, Fortuny, Legros, *et al*—became interested in the prints and began to collect and study them. Naturally they had considerable influence on their work, Whistler in particular having in his early works almost as much in common with the masters of Ukioye as in his later he has with the great Spanish painter with whom he is so frequently associated. One of his "symphonies" is hardly more than a transcript of "The Balcony" of Kiyonaga, and in another he follows Toyokuni so closely that even the little red decorative label on which the Japanese artist placed his signature is reproduced. His "nocturnes" are Hiroshiges done in pastel or oils.

As interest in the prints increased there arose a desire to know the history of the artists who had produced them. The revolution of 1868 opened Japan to foreigners, and a number of educated, appreciative connoisseurs were attracted thither. These studied with more or less thoroughness the art of the country and on their return to their homes published works on the subject. Other connoisseurs without the advantage of residence in Japan, but with the aid of Japanese lovers of their country's art who

had become domiciled in Europe and with access to the large collections that had been formed by museums and by private collectors, added to the literature of the subject. The publications of Anderson, Strange, and Holmes in England, Gonse, Bing, de Goncourt, and many others in France, Gierke, Brinckmann, and von Seidlitz in Germany, Madsen in Denmark, and Jarves, Morse, and Fenollosa in America have made accessible a mass of information in regard to Japanese painting in general and the especial school now under consideration in particular.

It has been shown, as was to be expected, that there has been a gradual evolution of the art of printing in colors from wood-blocks, and, thanks mainly to the researches of Mr. Fenollosa, the various steps in this evolution are now accurately known. A brief resumé will contribute to the appreciation of the prints.

Japanese painting, like the other arts of Japan, its poetry, and its science, is of Chinese origin,* and came to the island kingdom by way of Corea in the fifth century, A.D. At about the same time Corean painters made known to the Japanese the Buddhist art that had arisen in northwestern India, apparently under late Greek influence. This had much in common with Byzantine art, being stiff, formal, and hieratic in character, and glorying in the lavish use of gold and rich, but somewhat sombre, colors. The Chinese school, on the other hand, produced mainly black and white work that in the swift, easy flow of its lines gave evidence of its calligraphic origin. "All Chinese and Japanese critics," says Mr. Theodore Wores, "assert that painting is but a species of writing."†

By the union of these two and the peculiarly Japanese idiosyncracies, Japanese painting was evolved, the various schools depending on the varying proportions in which the

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* *Cf.* Anderson, Wm.: The Pictorial Arts of Japan. London, 1886.

Bing, S.: The Origin of Painting Gathered from History. Artistic Japan, Nos. 13 and 14.

† Wores, Theodore: An American Artist in Japan. Century Mag., 16:679.

ingredients were combined: the Tosa, for instance, has a preponderance of the Buddhist element; the Kano, of the Chinese; the Shijo and Ukioye, of the Japanese.

The Tosa and Kano schools were aristocratic, courtly—the first connected with the court of the Mikado at Kioto, the second with the court of the Tokugawa Shoguns at Yeddo, or as it is now called, Tokyo. About 1620 Iwasa Matahei, who had been a student of the Tosa, and later of Kano school, broke away from their formalism and traditions and painted in a freer, more vigorous, more realistic style. Moreover, instead of confining himself to subjects drawn from the courtly life, the history, and the aristocratic literature of Japan and China, Matahei painted the subjects that he saw in the every-day world about him. His example apparently was not immediately followed, but in the next century there arose a class of bourgeois artists who looked back to Matahei as their master, and to the school that was founded there was given the significant name Ukioye—Painting of the Floating (or Passing) World. This was, it must be remembered, distinctly the people's art; its artists were despised by those of the aristocratic schools, and to this day, when connoisseurs of all lands are singing the praises of the Ukioye school, the upper classes of Japan hold it somewhat in contempt. Mr. John La Farge, on his visit to Japan, found that in talking to artists of the Kano school, it was advisable to make no reference to the work of Hokusai, whom all European critics place among the world's master painters.*

Probably the fact that Matahei confined himself to painting, in part explains why his example was not at once imitated. To produce works that did not appeal to the class that could afford to buy and were necessarily too expensive for those to whom they did appeal, was to produce "art for art's sake" in a sense that, even in those days of uncommercial art, could not win many proselytes. Not till late in the seventeenth century did Matahei have a

*La Farge, John: An Artist's Letters from Japan. Century Mag., 24:427.

disciple. Then Hishigawa Moronobu followed his example in abandoning the wornout classical themes and finding his subjects in the commonplace, everyday life about him. To popularize his work he availed himself of the art of the wood-engraver, which had been introduced into Japan via Corea in the twelfth or thirteenth century and had theretofore been used mainly for the production of portraits of Buddhist saints whose woodenness was by no means confined to the block from which they were printed. Moronobu, however, produced books of pictures that mark the beginning of artistic wood-engraving in Japan. In these the common people, who could not afford original paintings, could indulge their taste for the artistic, and their popularity led Moronubu to issue many volumes. These, Dr. Anderson tells us, "include copies of famous pictures, drawings of landscapes and street scenes, illustrated stories, incidents of history, poetry, and in fact almost everything with which we are familiar in the works of later and better known men."* To add to the effect these black and white reproductions of sketches were sometimes "spotted" with color by hand.

Moronobu's success soon called forth imitators, and one of these, Okumura Masanobu, did not confine himself to the production of books, but issued independent pictures that could be hung on the wall like *kakemonos* or pasted on screens. These too were often hand-colored, but about 1743 there appeared prints from three blocks, one for the black outline, one for a pale rose tint, and one for a light green. Just who deserves the credit for this innovation is not certainly known—Mr. Fenollosa is inclined to credit it to Nishimura Shigenaga†—and is unimportant, for it was at once adopted by all the leading designers of the time. It seems strange to us that the possibilities of this new method were not at once grasped, but apparently fully fifteen years passed before a third color was added, and nearly twenty-

*Japanese Wood Engravings, p. 16.

†Fenollosa, Ernest F.: The Masters of Ukioye. New York, 1896, p. 23.

five before Suzuki Harunobu by the use of seven or eight blocks produced prints that were not merely "mosaics spotted on a white ground," but were pictures with atmosphere, background, and a more or less—generally less—correct perspective. It is for this reason that the Japanese usually term Harunobu the inventor of the *nishiki-ye*, though, as we have seen, he was merely the culmination of a century-long development.

Before a brief account of the principal schools, or "families," of the Ukioye is given, it may be well to explain a peculiarity in regard to the names by which the artists are known to us. These are never their family, but are merely their brush-names. Usually a painter's name indicates his relation to some preceding artist whose pupil he has been or whose work he strives to imitate. Often the first name indicates the school to which an artist belongs, while the second, by which he is generally known, is formed by a prefix or suffix to a part of the name of his special teacher. Thus a boy named Kumakichi was sent by his father to learn the art of color-printing from Utagawa Toyoharu and adopted the professional name of Utagawa *Toyo*kuni. He in turn had as a pupil *Kuni*sada, who was the teacher of *Sada*hide. Sometimes a master gave to a favorite pupil a name that he had himself abandoned, as Hokusai, about 1800, bestowed the name Shinsai on his pupil Hanji.* Sometimes after the death of a famous artist a successful pupil adopted his name, as in 1844, Toyokuni having been dead nineteen years, Kunisada issued a *surimono* announcing to his friends that thereafter he was to be known as Toyokuni. Toyokuni's son Naogiro also abandoned the name of Toyoshige that he had taken on becoming a student with his father, and adopted that of Toyokuni. As a more modern artist also complimented the great master of the Utagawa school in a similar manner, this brush-name appears on an immense number of prints that vary quite decidedly in artistic worth and commercial value.

*De Goncourt, Edmond: Hokousai. Paris, 1896, p 339.

Another element of perplexity to the collector comes from the fact, already indicated, that the painters sometimes changed their brush-names. The artist usually known as Hokusai, a name that does not indicate his relation to any preceding painter, but that means simply "the northern studio," is the most striking example of this: during his long life as an artist he used many different names, among them Katsugawa Shunro, Mugura Shunro, Taito, Tokitaro, Kako, Tamekazu, Manji, Shinsai, and Man Rojin. Naturally when one name is used by so many painters and so many names by one painter there are a number of problems connected with the history of the art about which the best critics are decidedly at variance, and one cannot be known as a collector of prints without being frequently called on to answer the question, "Do you think there was one Hiroshige, two Hiroshiges, or three Hiroshiges?" To which the only answer that avoids an argument is, "I do."

The first school of importance in the history of the Ukioye is the Torii. It was founded by Torii Kiyonobu, who flourished from 1710 to 1730, and included in a direct line Kiyomasu, Kiyoharu, Kiyomitsu, Kiyotsune, Kiyomine, and Kiyonaga. Strongly influenced by it were the great artists Shigenaga, Harunobu, Shigemasa, Yeishi, and Utamaro.* The greatest of the Torii, and many think of the whole Ukioye school, was Kiyonaga, whom Mr. Fenollosa terms "the central and culminating figure, with ripest mastery over all the technical points of the art of color-designing for prints."† According to Mr. Strange,‡ he was the first of the Torii to illustrate subjects from domestic life, his predecessors having devoted themselves exclusively to theatrical scenes and portraits of actors; but the accuracy of this statement may fairly be questioned. In beauty of line and color, grace, delicacy, and tender feeling, he is at

* *Cf.* De Goncourt, Edmond: Outamaro. Paris, 1891.

† The Masters of Ukioye, p. 115.

‡ Japanese Illustration, p. 26.

least the equal of Yeishi and Utamaro, who are sometimes ranked above him, while his pictures are free from the mannerisms and exaggerations that too often lower the artistic value of their works.

The next school to rise into prominence was the Katsugawa. This was founded by Shunsui, who died in 1750, and includes among others Shunsho, some of whose illustrated volumes are considered by Gonse* the most beautiful that Japan has produced, Shunko, Shunman, Shuncho, Shunzan, and Shunki. But the most famous of the school is Shunro, or Hokusai; who, however, long before his death departed from the style and traditions of the Katsugawa and founded a school of his own.†

The last, and by far the most prolific of the three principal schools, is the Utagawa. This was founded by Utagawa Toyoharu late in the eighteenth century, and includes Toyokuni, Toyohiro, Kunisada, Kuniyoshi, Kunimasu, Kunimaru, and a dozen of others of the tribe of Kuni-, Hiroshige, Yoshitoshi, Yoshitora, Sadahide, Sadamasa, and scores of less important men. Founded after deterioration had set in, the Utagawa school contains no artist that Mr. Fenollosa considers of second rank even, and but three—Toyoharu, Toyokuni, and Hiroshige—that he includes among those of third rank.‡ Naturally, as it was the latest and most prolific school, prints by the Utagawa are very plentiful.

Two of the artists that have been named deserve, even in a summary account of the Ukioye, a few words of special consideration. They are Hokusai and Hiroshige.

To one unfamiliar with his work the expressions used by European critics in writing of Hokusai seem extravagant, if not ridiculous. But the more one knows of him the more one is inclined to agree with the enthusiasts who rank him among the world's greatest artists. Strikingly

*Gonse, Louis: Japanese Art. Translated by M. P. Nickerson. Chicago, n. d. [1891], p. 68.

†*Cf.* Holmes, C. J.: Hokusai. London, 1899.

‡The Masters of Ukioye, p. 115.

original, wonderfully versatile, and amazingly productive, he influenced his country's art as no European artist has ever influenced his. In addition to producing a large number of *kakemonos*, *surimonos*, and broadsheets of great excellence, he illustrated over five hundred volumes—romances (some of them written by himself), poems, humorous works, books of travel, sketch-books, books of views, educational works, etc. Gonse estimates that the number of motives and compositions cut from his designs exceeds thirty thousand, and writes "There does not exist in the history of art another example of such versatility and industry."* He "was in the habit," Sir Rutherford Alcock tells us, "of going about the streets sketch-book in hand, and at all hours, transferring to its pages the figures, effects, and incidents passing before his eyes."† His work thus became "a complete picture of Japan, a veritable cyclopedia expressive and picturesque."* Mr. James J. Jarves speaks thus of his art: "It is supreme in its own ways and wholly free from inane types, wearisome conventionalities, and pettiness or shams of any sort; it goes directly to its point, scorning all subterfuge; sturdy, versatile, never repeating itself, every stroke or thought a distinct note in art, realistic or idealistic, as the motive demands, exhaustive of common and aristocratic life, spicing everything it touches with racy individuality, few, if any, artists of any country surpass Hoffskai in the faculty of making common things and little things tell more pleasurably to the fancy as artistic surprises and fresh interpretations of the ordinary phenomena of nature and society."‡

*Japanese Art, p. 267.

†Alcock, Sir Rutherford: Art and Art Industries in Japan. London, 1878, p. 135.

‡Jarves, James Jackson: A Glimpse of the Art of Japan. With Illustrations from Japanese Designs. New York, 1875. (The designs are reproductions of sketches by Hokusai. The book antedates by three years the account of the artist in the brief outline History of the Pictorial Art of Japan, contributed by Dr. Anderson to the Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan, for 1878, which in his Japanese Wood Engravings he terms "the first European account of Hokusai.")

Throughout his long life he was ever a student, never content with his achievements. This "noble discontent" is apparent in the prefaces of several of his volumes of sketches. The Hundred Views of Fuji was introduced with the words: "Since my sixth year I have felt the impulse to represent the form of things; by the age of fifty I had published numberless drawings; but I am displeased with all I have produced before the age of seventy. It is at seventy-three that I have begun to understand the form and the true nature of birds, of fishes, of plants, and so forth, consequently by the time I get to eighty, I shall have made much progress; at ninety, I shall get to the essence of things; at a hundred, I shall have most certainly come to a superior, undefinable position; and at the age of one hundred and ten, every point, every line, shall be alive. And I leave it to those who shall live as long as I have myself, to see if I have not kept my word. Written, at the age of seventy-five, by me, formerly known as Hokusai, but now known as Gakyo Rojin (The Old Man gone Mad for Painting.)"*

In the preface to his Saishiki-Tsu (Complete Account of Coloring), published when he was eighty-eight, he indicated the tentative nature of his instructions by stating "when I am ninety, I shall change the style of the art, and when I am a hundred, I shall work a revolution in all branches of the arts."†

His humor and his passion for his art appear in the cover-design that he made for an elementary book on coloring that he wrote for children; it represents him painting with a brush in his mouth, a brush in each hand, and a brush between the toes of each foot!

Hokusai did not attain the great age that he desired, but died at ninety in 1849. His last letter, written to an old

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*Quoted by John La Farge. Century Mag., 24:427.

†Translated for me from the Ukioye Hennenshi (Chronological Account of the Ukioye School) of Tadatake Sekibar, by Mr. Yoshisaburo Kuno, Japanese Assistant in the University of California.

friend is "so gay and so sad, so triumphant over circumstances, so expressive of the view of the world which explains his wood-cuts"* that it should be known to every admirer of his art. It is thus given by Prof. Edward R. Morse, who received it direct from a pupil of Hokusai whose father was a friend of the recipient of the letter:

"King Ema [a sort of Japanese Pluto] has grown very old, and is about to retire from office. He has accordingly had built for him a nice little house in the country, and wants me to paint a kakamono. I must start within a few days, and when I go I shall take my drawings with me, and take lodgings at the corner of Jigoku dori Nichome [Hell Street] and shall be very glad to have you visit me when you have occasion to go there. HOKUSAI."†

On his death-bed he is said to have exclaimed, "If heaven would give me but another five years . . . I might yet become a great painter." He was buried in the garden of the Seikioji temple at Asakusa, and on his tombstone was cut the epithet he so frequently put on his designs, "the old man mad about painting."‡

He came too late in the history of color-printing to contribute much to its development, but as an artist he influenced to a greater or less extent all who came after him. Of his immediate pupils the most successful was Kiosai, sometimes from his faithfulness to his master's style and method termed Hokusai the Second. Though Dr. Anderson terms him "as poor, as eccentric, and almost as gifted as Hokusai himself,"§ Kiosai's range was comparatively narrow; he lacks Hokusai's amazing versatility, and only in his comic work challenges comparison with his master.

While M. Geffroy's statement, "All Japanese artists

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*La Farge, Century Mag., 24:427.

†Morse, Edw. R.: Notes on Hokusai. American Art Review, 1:147.

‡De Goncourt, Hokousai, p. 264.

§Anderson, Wm.: A Japanese Artist, Kawanabe Kiosai. International Studio, 6:29.

have been landscape painters,"* may be true, it is also true that in the Ukioye school, as in European art, the independent treatment of landscape came rather late in the development. Again as in European art, landscape first made its appearance as a background for figure-pieces. The first to treat it for its own sake was Toyoharu, who is said to have derived the idea from some European woodcuts introduced through the Dutch Colony at Nagasaki.† His crude endeavors were continued by his pupil Toyohiro but not until Toyohiro's pupil Hiroshige began his work in the third decade of the last century were landscape-prints produced worthy of comparison with the best figure-pieces of the eighteenth century. "In Hiroshige's new method the Japanese beheld for the first time landscape art as a mosaic of characteristic local colors. His skies were solid blue, pink, purple, or lead-color, with clouds or sunsets in realistic hues; his foliage solid greens of opposing values. The reds of temples, the browns and grays and azures of wooden bridges and buildings, even the colors of peasants' clothing, enter the same scale with colors of sky and earth, diversifying rather than dominating them."†

He moreover adopted, though with imperfect knowledge, European perspective, so that his landscapes please many to whom Japanese prints in general are caviare. Though he illustrated many other localities, his favorite subjects were Yeddo and its environs; the Tokaido, the sea-coast road connecting Yeddo and Kioto; and the Kisokaido, the inland road between the same cities. He excels in representations of moonlight, snow, mist, and storms. He did not confine himself to landscapes, but drew birds, flowers, and fish with marvelous fidelity; illustrated history and legend; and published figure-pieces similar to those of Kunisada and caricature broadsides after the style of Hokusai. "Outside

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*Geffroy, Gustave: Japanese Landscape Painters. Artistic Japan, No. 32, p. 409.

†Fenollosa, Mary McNeil: Hiroshige, the Artist of Mist, Snow, and Rain. San Francisco, 1901, p. 8.

his landscapes," however, "there was little in his work that would earn him distinction in his school, but in his specialty he stands far above his fellows."* Von Seidlitz calls him "the last great master of Japan."†

Thoroughly to enjoy Japanese prints one must so far as possible divest himself of many of the tastes and ideals formed by a study of our own art. De Quincey's dictum in regard to a certain class of literary works, "Not to sympathize is not to understand" must, if this exotic art is to be appreciated, be supplemented by its converse, Not to understand is not to sympathize. The connoisseur may readily grant that in a print the perspective is false, the proportions of the figure incorrect, and the drawing, especially of the hands and feet, ridiculous; and yet he may find the picture full of charm. It must be kept in mind that during the best period of Japanese color-printing a picture never lost its decorative and calligraphic character. Realism was no part of the artist's aim; the curtain so painted as to deceive the beholder into an attempt to put it aside would have awakened only his scorn. Mr. Theodore Wores tells us that a native painter in Japan thus criticised European art: "It seems to me that your chief aim is to produce a real effect; in fact you strive to make your picture look so real as to deceive one into a belief that he is looking at nature. Now do you think this can be accomplished with paint?" On the other hand, he further tells us, "It is the spirit more than the substance that the Japanese artist strives to reproduce."‡ Nature furnishes him merely an alphabet whose letters he strives so to combine as to produce poems, rhythmical creations of harmonious beauty. By giving only what is absolutely essential, by the placing of his masses, by gracefully flowing lines, and by a tender harmony of colors, the artist tries, not to

*Anderson, Wm.: Hiroshige. Artistic Japan, No. 16, p. 197.

†Seidlitz, W. v.: Geschichte des japanischen Farbenholzschnitts. Dresden, 1897, p. 198.

‡Century Mag., 16: 683,2.

imitate his subject, but to call up in his beholder feelings and sentiments similar to those aroused in himself by that subject. "To understand his paintings, it is from this standpoint they must be regarded; not as soulless photographs of scenery, but as poetic presentations of the spirit of the scenes."* In a word, long before Manet, Monet, and Degas the Japanese artists were impressionists, and their influence on the latest phases of French art has not as yet been adequately recognized.

Here there was undoubtedly a relation of cause and effect, but no such relation can be traced between the Japanese artists and the masters of another school with which they have much in common. One who knows and loves early Italian art cannot but be strongly reminded of the frescoes of Cimabue and Giotto and the panel-pictures of Giovanni Bellini and Vittore Carpaccio as he gazes at the best work of the masters of the Ukioye,—Kiyonaga and Yeishi, Harunobu and Utamaro. Here is found in perfection that "sweet unloaded flavoring of personal predilection without the taint of personal self-display" that Sir W. M. Rossetti, in somewhat "precious" diction, tells us the members of the Preraphaelite Brotherhood found so alluring in the work of the painters that they took as their masters.

The decorative nature of Japanese painting makes it much more akin to our mural painting than to our easel pictures. It has the same simplicity and "flatness," but in much greater degree; pictures being considered finished that seem to us merely sketches, and chiaro-oscuro being almost entirely neglected. It has, moreover, certain characteristics that are no more true of our mural painting than of our easel pictures: the point of view is almost always high, as in all early art; the perspective, before Dutch influence made itself apparent, is ludicrously false; conventions are freely used; and a color-scheme entirely different

*Lowell, Percival: The Soul of the Far East; III, Art. Atlantic Mo., 60: 620.

from that of nature is frequently adopted. Some of these peculiarities deserve more particular consideration.

No attempt was made to give apparent relief to a figure by light and shade, shadows being well-nigh universally omitted. Peter Schlemihl would have found himself quite *à la mode* in Japanese-print-land! A landscape by Hiroshige and a picture of a young girl standing in the snow by Yoshitora are noted simply because in them shadows *are* represented. This absence of shadows, combined with the frequent lack of background and of all support or base, often makes the figures appear as if cut out and pasted on a sheet. This peculiarity does not affect us as strongly as it did the early collectors, for our poster-artists, deriving the idea directly from these prints, have made us familiar with pictures of this sort.

It follows as a corollary from what has been said that the color represented is usually "local color"—usually because the pictures of rain and mist by Hiroshige certainly do represent atmospheric effect. As has been suggested, the painter was unusually daring in his use of color and was not at all trammeled by the facts of nature; if his color-scheme seemed to demand it, he did not hesitate to make his sky yellow, his trees blue, and his water red. And the fact that our attention is not attracted to the incongruity is a tribute to his knowledge of color-harmony. The impression given is sometimes just what one would receive from the scene, though hardly an object in the picture is represented in its true color.

The conventions of the painters, it is frequently difficult for us to accept. Nowhere is the idealistic and conventional nature of this art more apparent than in the representation of night scenes. Everything is usually seen as distinctly as if in broad daylight, only the introduction of lamps or lanterns, if the scene is an interior, of the moon or a dark gray or deep blue sky, if it is an exterior, denoting the difference. The famous subject "a black cat in a dark room at midnight" would have presented no

difficulties to the Japanese artist: he would simply have represented the cat standing or lying at the foot of a lamp, and both as distinctly visible as if the time were high noon. Here again Hiroshige breaks away from the usual practice: in a glorious print representing a fête on a river, the houses and trees on the farther shore are dimly seen in darker blue againt a deep blue sky; the middle distance, an island in the river, is in gray with the houses and merry-makers more apparent; but the party in the foreground is represented as if in strong daylight, even the details of the patterns on the *kimonos* being represented!

The treatment of the sea is also highly conventional. Seldom is there an attempt to represent "the multitudinous seas": usually a few lines in the foreground are considered sufficient to suggest "the waves of the numberless waters," while the background of the sea-scape is untouched paper up to the line that represents the horizon. Sometimes a tremendous wave is shown breaking in the foreground, while just beyond it the sea appears to enjoy a halcyon calm. A further peculiarity of the water is that usually it neither reflects nor refracts. In a few prints by late men, Kuniyoshi, for instance, reflections of the moon or of the piers of a bridge are to be seen, but even in these prints other objects are unreflected. No swan on Hiroshige's lake "floats double, swan and shadow."

Clouds also presented great difficulty to the color-print designer until the invention of gradation printing. In the later prints of Hiroshige the lightness and fleeciness of clouds are thus admirably represented, but in his early prints, as in those of Hokusai, there are simply sharp-cut decorative labels of color to indicate clouds. Sometimes these occur in a puzzling manner, and apparently are introduced, not to represent clouds or anything else, but simply to help out the color-scheme.

Finally the figures represented were ideal and conventional. Hokusai and Kiosai were much more realistic in this respect than the artists of the eighteenth century, but

they too had their conventions. Of the women of Shunsho, Yeishi, Toyokuni, Utamaro, and Harunobu, Dr. Anderson says: "The gorgeously attired women . . . are pure conventions, that bear scarcely any resemblance to the real Japanese maiden either in features, form, or proportions. . . . They are not the women of Japan or of any other country, but of the artist's imagination."*

Having once opened their doors to foreigners, the Japanese were quick to learn from the Western nations, and events in China during the last few months seem to indicate that they have "bettered the instruction," and are now able to give lessons in organization, discipline, and self-control to the nations of Christendom that have hitherto been their instructors. The progress of the country and the rapid adoption and assimilation of Occidental arts, sciences, and social ideals during the last third of the century just closed has provoked the wonder and admiration of the world. That the old feudal and caste system would be swept away so easily, so quickly, and so completely could not have been anticipated from the history of the centuries during which the country was a hermit nation. The change was necessary if Japan was to preserve its autonomy, and it would be idle to deny the manifold advantages it has brought to the Japanese. But in the exchange of old lamps for new it was almost inevitable that, with a deal of antiquated rubbish, there should pass out of her possession one of magic-working power. The old art is gone as completely as the age of chivalry. That of to-day is a hybrid. Even in the works of Hokusai and Hiroshige traces of European influence have been noted: contemporaneous Japanese art is saturated with it. Full of superficial prettiness and facile cleverness, it has lost the simplicity, naive charm, and subtle harmony of color and of line of the old Japanese; and it has not gained the solid excellencies of the European. *Nishiki-ye* are still produced, the popularity of the broadsides representing events in the

*Japanese Wood Engravings, pp. 28, 30.

Japanese-Chinese war having brought about a revival of an industry that was languishing. But from a collector's point of view the prints of Ogata Gekko, and Yoshimune Trai are valueless—save as foils to make apparent the worth and beauty of the color-prints of *old* Japan.

Fuit Ilium! And over the entrance to one of the museums in which, after the masterpieces of their art have been scattered to the ends of the earth, the Japanese are tardily endeavoring to collect what still remains in the country, might fitly be inscribed Emerson's words: "For everything you have missed, you have gained something else; and for everything you gain you lose something." Japan now has most of the nuisances, many of the conveniences, and some of the blessings of our civilization—and Japanese art has paid the price. How heavy that price, the Japanese themselves have begun to realize; as was evidenced by the closing of the Foreign Art School and the opening of the School of Native Art in 1888. Its influence is already apparent,* but a truly national art is impossible at the present stage of Japan's development. That of to-day is not "bone of its bone, flesh of its flesh," as the Ukioye formerly was.

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*Fenollosa, Ernest F.: Art in Contemporary Japan. Century Mag., 24: 577.