

THE JAPANESE FLORAL CALENDAR.

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VIII. THE LOTUS.

THE lotus is pre-eminently the flower of Buddhism. It is "said to be the king of flowers in India, and is consequently entitled to precedence on the *toko-no-ma*. It is often called *Hotoke no hana*, or the 'Flower of the Buddhist Spirits,' and on account of its religious character is disliked for occasions of rejoicing." It is the emblem of purity, because "it grows unsullied out of the mud"; it "forms the resting-place of Buddha"; and "the fortunate entrance to Paradise is seated" upon it. When two lovers used to commit suicide together their motto was as follows:¹ "*Hasu no hana no ue ni oite matan.*" "On the lotus-blossoms of paradise they shall rest together."

The popular conceptions of the lotus are further illustrated by the following quotations:²

"Though growing in the foulest slime, the flower remains pure and undefiled. And the soul of him who remains ever pure in the midst of temptation is likened unto the lotus.² Therefore is the lotus carven or painted upon the furniture of temples, therefore also does it appear in all the representations of our Lord Buddha. In Paradise the blessed shall sit upon the cups of golden lotus-flowers."

In Tokyo the pond near Uyeno is famous for its lotus; but one of the largest and loveliest ponds in Japan is said to be at Hikone on Lake Biwa. This was visited by Mr. H. T. Finck, author of *Lotus Time in Japan*, in which, however, he attempts no de-

¹Hearn's *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan*

²"Like a lotus-flower growing in the mud" is a common Japanese proverb. Other sayings refer to "a pure and beautiful woman in a haunt of vice" and "a man of stainless honor in a wicked world."

scription of the lotus. He says: "But how can any one be expected to sketch this marvellous flower in words, when even a great painter can give but a vague idea of its beauty?" He then quotes Mr. Alfred Parsons in the following confession: "The lotus is one of



the most difficult plants which it has ever been my lot to try and paint; the flowers are at their best only in the early morning, and each blossom, after it has opened, closes again before noon the first day; on the second day its petals drop. The leaves are so large and

so full of modelling that it is impossible to generalize them as a mass; each one has to be carefully studied, and every breath of wind disturbs their delicate balance and completely alters their forms. Besides this, their glaucous surface, like that of a cabbage leaf, reflects every passing phase of the sky, and is constantly changing in color as clouds pass over."

"Children use the big [lotus] leaves for sunshades, the seeds for marbles or to eat"; and the people eat lotus roots without forgetting their native land! Mr. Finck also states that the conundrum, "When is a pond not a pond?" is answered by saying, "When it has no lotus in it."

The lotus is, of course, a favorite subject of Japanese art: "its leaves are usually gemmed with dew-drops, and this effect the artist seizes upon at once."¹ In this connection Mr Huish also quotes the following poem:

"Oh! Lotus leaf, I dreamt that the whole earth
Held nought more pure than thee; held nought more true:
Why, then, when on thee rolls a drop of dew,
Pretend that 'tis a gem of priceless worth?"

Heuzen, A. D. 836—856.

¹Huish's *Japan and Its Art*.