ART AND DOMESTIC LIFE IN JAPAN.

BY M. ANESAKI.

THERE is no country where the life of the people is not conditioned by nature and their art to some extent connected with it; but in Japan perhaps more than anywhere else daily life has been in especially close touch with nature and moulded according to the artistic sense. The life of the Japanese may be said to be more primitive than that of many other civilized poeples, because it is more exposed to nature, or rather more intimate with nature; yet this primitiveness is refined and elaborated by the keen sense for the pure and simple beauty of nature. Leaving out of consideration the gorgeous palaces and ornate religious decorations, Japanese art is manifested in the life of the people at large in a direct adoption from nature and a modification of life according to its inspiration.

In the islands of Japan nature is an intimate friend of the people, in spite of hurricanes, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions which are frequent visitors. The land and atmosphere are smiling and benignant accompaniments of life to the optimistic people. The blue sea in the bright sunshine is indented by picturesque promontories studded with fanciful pine-trees. There are high mountains, but most of them are gentle in slope. Even Mount Fuji, the highest peak and an ancient volcano, usually has a mild rather than a rugged aspect, and in the spring looks "like a white fan hanging down from the sky," as a poet expressed it. The climate is mild, and the fishermen along the southern coasts wear but simple thin clothing in the winter, while the northern coasts are covered with snow.

Flowers, both grasses and trees, are abundant everywhere, and the foot of Fuji is surrounded by cherry-trees, so that the ancient Japanese called the genius of the mountain the Lady-Who-Makes-the-Trees-Bloom. Maples redden in the autumn, as crimson

as any American maples, but the leaves are extremely delicate and fine. There is no association of wildness about maples, but the spirit of autumn is personified as the Brocade-Weaving-Lady, who can be worshiped among the hills as well as invited into the miniature gardens. Moreover the fauna of Japan is peculiarly destitute of beasts of prey, the sole exception perhaps being the wolf. Thus

ARASHI-YAMA, WITH THE WATERS OF THE RIVER KATSURA.

This is a place famous for its cherry-blossoms in the spring and for maple leaves in the autumn, which cover all the hillsides. The place has ever since the ninth century been one of the beloved spots near Kyoto, where the court nobles organized their feasts and the people their picnic parties. A picnic boat is seen. Photograph by Dr. W. S. Bigelow of Boston.

flowers and animals are always associated both in life and in art. The nightingales flying among the plum-flowers, the peony-flowers and butterflies in the warm sunlight of spring, the deer loitering under the crimson maples, the fox and the reeds in the pale autumn moonlight—these are painted and celebrated in song over and over again, and man shares the company of these lovely creatures, either

in his garden or in the forests. Man and nature standing opposed and God ruling both from above—this was the teaching of the church in Europe during the Middle Ages. All Japanese religions taught a very different message, namely that divinity, either as deities or spirits, is to be found in man and nature, and that these two are the best of friends, both being children of the cosmic life. The gentle friendliness of nature in Japan, together with the religious ideas inculcated in the people, have helped them to live in

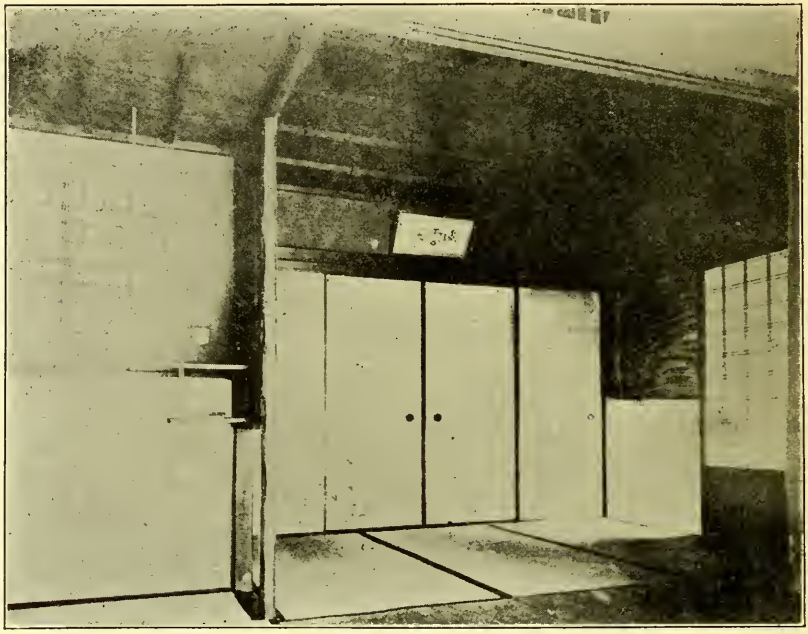
A TEA-ROOM DATING FROM THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY.

Note that the building is so situated among trees that it looks like a simple cottage; yet each of the stones and lanterns is arranged according to certain rules of the tea ceremony.

intimate relationship with nature. Japanese painting and poetry do not often reach sublimity, but a soothing mildness is to be found everywhere in art, as in life.

Intimacy with nature is most conspicuously manifest in the simplicity of Japanese homes. This simplicity is the result of two factors, the preservation of the archaic style in architecture and the openness of the house. The primitive house of Japan, before the introduction of Buddhism, consisted in the simplest arrangement of straight pillars driven into the earth and covered by a thatched

roof. It can hardly be called artistic, yet the white pillars exhibit a singularly pure simplicity and the whole structure an archaic sobriety. What added refinement to this was the introduction of the tea-room. Here I cannot enter into details about the tea-room and explain the source from which the cult of tea, Tea-ism, has derived its inspiration, but must content myself with saying that the tea-room was a manifestation of the soul purified, poised, pacified and illumined in the contemplation of the Zen method, which



THE INTERIOR OF A TEA-ROOM DATING FROM THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY.

Note the bare simplicity of the room. Some of the woods used retain barks, and the floor is matted with pure yellowish mattings.

influenced deeply and widely the life and thought of the Japanese since the thirteenth century. The combined effect of primitive simplicity and of Zen purity permeated into every corner of the Japanese home, and the people, eager to keep the old style, added the sober refinement of meditative training to the original simplicity.

Now the union of the primitive style and the meditative mood is manifested in an austere simplicity, to describe which I cannot do better than quote a well-known poem which runs as follows:

"A cottage stood there, a human abode,
Of woods tied together and covered with straw;
Another morrow, ties gone and thatch scattered,
See it reduced to wilderness, as it had used to be!"

The refinement added to this simplicity consists in so selecting the building material and the constructive configuration that the human abodes might retain as much as possible the flavor and tone of wild nature. For this purpose costly timbers are brought together from great distances, in order to harmonize the surface grain of the pillars and ceiling or to finish the allusions to the things of nature suggested by the timbers. A workman would spend days in selecting a suitable piece of wood for a certain place, or in meditating how a piece of wood should be cut or planed to harmonize with other pieces. This comes from the fact that the Japanese house is usually not painted, and the pride of a rich house often consists in how much pains and money were bestowed on an apparently simple structure of natural wood. In this connection I can do nothing better than quote Dr. Morse, who says:

"Oftentimes in some of the parts the original surface of wood is left, sometimes the bark retained. Whenever the Japanese workman can leave a bit of nature in this way he is delighted to do so. He is sure to avail himself of all curious features in wood: it may be the effect of some fungoid growth which marks a bamboo curiously; or the sinuous tracks produced by the larvae of some beetle that oftentimes traces the surface of wood just below the bark, with a curious design; or a knot or burl. His eyes never miss these features in finishing a room." (*Japanese Homes,* p. 111.)

A house built in a style like this, aiming at an imitation of nature, cannot but be pure and simple, though the selection of the wood may sometimes tend to extravagance and the combination may be degenerated to mannerism.

Another consequence of this intimacy with nature is the openness of the abode. As a rule the Japanese house is open on almost all sides, the sides having little walls and consisting of large windows, as it were, extending from corner to corner and from ceiling to floor. The partition between the inside and outside is kept simply by paper slidings which allow light and even wind. By opening the paper slides and taking one step across the verandah one can enter the house, or can pass from any room to the outside and into the garden. Through the open space snowflakes or flower-petals,—even butterflies or birds—may come, driven by the wind.

"Even moonshine," wrote a writer of the fourteenth century, "seems to gain in friendly brilliancy, striking into the house where a good man lives in peaceful ease." In the night the wooden slides are closed around the veranda. The rustle of these wooden slides by blowing wind, or the soft sound of the accumulated snow falling down from bamboo leaves in a serene night, is regarded as highly poetic and inspiring and is sung in many lyrics. In this way the Japanese house is a shelter, but in an extremely meagre sense of the word. The people live, even in the house, in close communication with the outside, i. e., more exposed to nature than western people; and there is almost no necessity of special ventilation. This fact has a great bearing not only upon the art of embellishing the house itself but upon the artistic sense of the people in general.

Naturally the rooms are simple and severe, in accordance with the general tone of the abode. A room with little furniture, surrounded by paper screens and with the floor invariably matted with pale yellowish mattings, cannot but be simple. In this simplicity there is something suggesting primitiveness, which however is attained by careful avoidance of pretentiousness and by tasteful selection of ornament which looks very sparse and severe.

Avoiding minute descriptions I wish to point out one significant feature in the room decoration, namely, the fact that regular symmetry is carefully avoided and the free air of nature is imitated. The paper screens, which correspond to the wall-paper of the western home, are designed with free-hand painting in order to avoid symmetrical effects; and even in the case of printed patterns they are designed with scattered maple leaves or studded with young pines of irregular growth. The simple paper screen facing the outside, which corresponds to window-glass and curtains, is covered with thin semi-transparent paper onto which dried leaves or flowers are pasted. In a recess reserved on one side of a room there are often shelves for the reception of miniature carvings or books and rolls. These shelves, usually two in number, are never symmetrical, but arranged to be alternate, i. e., the one wing terminating in the middle, and the one below it projected from the other side and terminating in the middle. The two are connected by a short pillar which may be of various designs, in accordance with which the shelves are called the "thin mist" or "one leaf" or "plum branch." In all these and other decorations symmetrical regularity is avoided, almost instinctively, in order to retain the flavor of nature in the rooms.

The most prominent feature in the design of a room is the

toko-no-ma, an alcove or recess on one side of the room raised a little above the floor. I might call it the little shrine dedicated to the genius of simple beauty, because there hangs a picture or a calligraphic writing, and it is the chief seat of artistic display in the room. A flower-vase stands in front of the picture or hangs on a pillar at the one end of the recess, and from the incense-pot, which is placed near the flower-vase, there arises the smoke of incense, the incense which never irritates the sense but enables one to inhale the essence of delicacy and composure. There is usually but one picture, at most three as a kind of triptich, and the pictures are changed according to the seasons, together with the flowers,—in the early spring a picture of plum-blossoms under snow, in the summer wistaria and carp in the water below, etc. It is in this alcove that the cult, of course in a vague sense of the word, of beauty is held and the fragrant or brilliant gifts of nature are invoked. I call this a cult because the practice of keeping this recess for art apart from the rest of the room has been derived from the inspiration of Zen Buddhism, a religion of the serene and meditative enjoyment of nature's beauty.

As a matter of course the garden, the trees and stone in it, the hedges erected in various parts of the garden, the stone lantern and the stone stand for the water-pot,—all that surrounds the house—should participate in the spirit of adoration of nature's beauty. The garden is indeed in Japan a continuation of the house structure. One can imagine this close connection between the garden and the house by thinking of the Japanese house as a whole to be a kind of arbor or veranda. The people live in the house, but they do not only have free access to the garden on all sides of the house but enjoy the sight, fragrance and air of the garden freely from inside, because the demarcation between the two is neither clear nor solid. In short the Japanese abode is more a camp life than a dwelling in the western sense. Let me again quote Dr. Morse, who says:

"Severe and simple as a Japanese room appears to be, it may be seen by this figure (an illustration in his book) how many features for decorative display come in. The ornamental openings or windows with their varied lattices, the sliding screens and the cupboards with their rich sketches of landscapes and trees, the natural woods, indeed many of these features might plainly be adopted without modification for our rooms." (*Japanese Homes*, p. 141.)

Now I have dwelt comparatively at length on the house because it is the fundamental condition of domestic life and the place where the people's esthetic sentiment is expressed conspicuously and constantly. Thus life and art are closely allied in the Japanese home, art being an introduction of the spirit and vitality of nature into the human abode,—an art which is preeminently an imitation of nature. Art should not be limited in our conception and practice to palaces and museums but permeate every one's daily life without regard to the distinction of wealth or class. There was and is in Japan an art for the rich, but the people at large share the gift of nature's beauty, each according to his taste and means. Thus even a poor man's house has a certain space of garden, and even in the house of meagerest appearance there is always the *toko-no-ma*, the chapel of simple beauty.

There is little gorgeous or pretentious in the life of a people like this, who try always to mould the surroundings according to the suggestions and inspiration given by nature. The art in their daily life consists just in applying the curves and colors found in nature to everything, however small and petty it may be. The Japanese are known in the west as the people of pretty things, the people of miniatures. This is not wholly true, for the religious art of Japan has produced a gigantic bronze statue, over sixty feet in height, and there were and are palaces and temples of grand dimensions and of gorgeous decorations. But the saying is true as regards the life of the people at large—this cannot be otherwise, for their art consists essentially in an invocation of nature into their home. "The most trivial aim," as Captain Brinkeley said, "derives dignity from the earnestness with which it is pursued, and the Japanese can be just as much in earnest about the lightest fancy as about the weightiest fact. They know how to be picturesquely great in small things." (*Japan*, VI, p. 48.)

The earnest desire to imitate nature manifests itself in every phase of Japanese life and I wish to elucidate this a little more.

The utensils and tools in domestic life form one illustration of this fact. The dipper for ladling water is often made of a simple bamboo stem; the stand for holding brushes and pencils is always of bamboo; the soup-spoon of pottery is shaped like a petal and is called the "flying lotus-petal"; the chop-sticks are made of pieces of wood savoring of the forest; on the tiny lacquered dining-table may be a picture of the moon with a flying wild goose; the soup-bowl may be painted with a carp in water together with water-weeds; on the pottery plates stands a hermit looking at a waterfall

painted in blue, or a poet with his pet crane, sitting under a pine-tree. In all these designs there is never a perfect symmetry but always a piece of nature in a natural aspect.

The dishes are served in a similar way. On the dining-table are arranged usually five dishes simultaneously, a soup-bowl in lacquer, a rice-bowl of pottery, three other plates of different sizes and shapes, for fish and vegetables. Moreover the dishes, whether for fish or vegetables, are decorated with grass-leaves, flowers, sea-weeds, all of different colors and cuts. Here let me quote an English lady who says: "I lunched once with a professor in Tokyo; it was a modest meal in the house of a man poorly off, according to our ideas, but when the red-lacquered trays came in, each lunch on its own tray, and all the courses served together, I could not restrain a cry of delight. The whole set out in its red-lacquered tray was a picture, each dish in itself was another. The golden bream lay on a pale blue dish; an oval slab of pounded fish, pure white in colour, rested against a mound of lime-green chestnuts; in front and lying in a crescent curve were purple roots, brown ginger and tiny slices of red radish. It was simply a triumph. I have eaten pinkish brown soup in which the curved peel of orange floated like a golden dolphin; pale yellow custards served in delicate blue bowls whose surfaces were ruffled with silver fishes; white rice-moulds wrapped in the delicate tendrills of a vine-green sea-weed; thin slices of pink roe-fish, the color of an uncooked salmon, laid out on green dishes and garnished with little heaps of olive sea-weed shaven fine and eaten with a burnt-sienna sauce.... You can eat almost every variety of chrysantheum, as well as see it, and the colouring, all vegetable, is almost as beautiful." (A. H. Edwards, *Kakemono,* p. 128-9.)

Clothing naturally is changed according to the season, not only in material, color and style but also in patterns, which are chiefly taken from the flowers. Especially the clothing of young girls has always certain patterns, whether in the whole robes or in the neck-bands or in the skirts. These designs of flowers are patterns, never completely conventionalized but more or less akin to nature, i. e., in painting style. Adonis flowers in snow, irises and a wooden bridge, wild pinks with dew-drops, maple leaves floating on streams, chrysanthemums and a straw fence,—these are adapted to decorative design and dyed or embroidered. The change of season is manifested in the designs of robes among the girls of the poorer classes, to their parents' pride and to their own delight. Besides the change of pattern and material the seasons are indi-

cated in the juxtaposition of colors, such as we see in Beatrice when her sight is caught by Dante among the heavenly hosts and she is robed in hue of living flame, with a green mantle and white veil over it. These juxtapositions are named after the flowers of the season, and it is meant by wearing the robes of the seasons to emulate or to imitate nature and to live in harmony with the changes of nature's face. To take a few examples: white and violet, called plum; pink and green, peach-flower; white and pale pink,

A LADY PAINTER WORKING ON HER SILK.

The Japanese painter usually works on his or her silk or paper (corresponding to canvass) laid horizontally on the floor. The enclosure where a scroll hangs is the *toko-no-ma* alcove where palm-trees stand and flowers are arranged in a vase. Photograph by Dr. W. S. Bigelow of Boston.

peony; cyanic blue and green, Japanese bell-flower; dark violet and brown, the fallen chestnut; violet blue and green, the mountain blue-bell, etc. Besides the clothing the lantern hanging on the veranda, the bamboo blinds around the room, the cushions for sitting, the pictures hanging in the *toko-no-ma* alcove,— these too are changed in color and style according to the season. This is quite natural to the people who live in closest touch with nature, and in ancient times the terms for the changes were prescribed

and those who would fail to observe the rules were regarded as men of no culture and refinement.

This point brings me to the consideration of the festivals of the seasons and the floral calendar. I shall here simply enumerate the chief festivals. Including the New Year's festival, which is a great thing in Japan, the festivals are always associated with the flowers of the seasons, the New Year's decorations being the plum-flower, pine and bamboo. The 3d of the third lunar month is the day for girls, a merry doll day in which peach-flowers play the central part. The 8th of the fourth month is the birthday of Buddha, the day being observed more out of doors than indoors and the azalea being the chief flower. The 5th of the fifth month is the day for boys, another doll day, in which iris flowers together with mugwort leaves are offered to the dolls of warriors. The 7th evening of the seventh month is the night observed in honor of the two stellar constellations, the Herdboy Prince and the Weaver Princess who are said to wed on that evening. No flowers are used in this festival, but the leaves of a tree called *kaji* are offered to the stars, being floated on water which reflects their twinkling light. On the three days in the middle of the seventh month the Japanese All Souls' Day is observed, and on the 15th of the eighth month the festival of the moon, on both of which a kind of reed with its flowerlike ears is offered to the respective objects of adoration. The 9th of the ninth month is the day of chrysanthemums, which is now observed on the late emperor's birthday, the 3d of November.

Beside these chief festivals, which are social and domestic at the same time, the flowers of every season receive their respective attention and respect. The floral calendar gives the times of their blooming and directions as to the places where the best of those are to be seen and enjoyed, according to which the family or a group of friends or schoolboys would go picnicking. They are floral shows, not in the horticultural halls but in the open air and in the heart of nature. I shall not enumerate the seasonal succession of these flowers but point out just one thing in connection with the floral calendar; that is, the custom of "hearing insects," which is mentioned in the calendar, together with the hearing of nightingales, of cuckoos, of water-rails, of plovers. You can see, toward an autumnal evening, in the suburbs of any town, groups composed chiefly of men, going to the fields with gourds in their hands. It is the party who go to hear the mournful and quieting songs of the insects, such as grasshoppers, crickets, the "weaving insects,"

the "bell-insects," the "pine-insects," etc. The party stretches out mattings on the ground at a suitable place on a hillside or in a field and remains till late in the evening enjoying the natural orchestra played by the six-legged musicians and also enjoying the *saké* drink which they have brought in the hollowed gourds. The insect-hearing takes place in autumn and similarly in the summer evenings people go out to the fields where there are waters, in order to see the flying glow-flies. The Japanese have been richly provided with the symphony orchestra and moving pictures by benignant mother Nature, and her children faithfully and piously record these performances in their floral calendar. Of course these insects are also brought into the homes for the sake of old men and children who are not able to risk the cool air of the autumn evenings.

Thus far I have tried to state a few points concerning Japanese life in its relation to the esthetic sense of the people, which is intimately allied with their love for nature. The love of nature and its manifestations is almost inevitable in the life of any primitive people because of its archaic simplicity. But I wonder whether there is any uncivilized people who care to listen to the music of insects or take pains to change their clothing according to the flowers of the season. The simplicity of Japanese life and art is not a primitive and undeveloped rusticity but the result of a trained and very thoughtful refinement which manifests itself in subdued sobriety and severe purity in every aspect of life. The arches and honeysuckles of the Renaissance are surely a product of art, but I believe that the art in the life of the Japanese is to be reckoned with side by side with other sorts of art. In conclusion I wish to call attention to the fact that the artistic sense manifested in this sober and simple purity is a product of the religious inspiration given by Shinto, the native religion of Japan, and by Zen, the Buddhist naturalism and intuitionalism. I must await another occasion to elucidate these religions and how they have worked to mould the artistic sense of the Japanese.