



THE JAPANESE FAN.

"My love is like the snow on the mountain
Fusiyama,
So deep, and so deep that it never shall
be melted."



THE evolution of the Japanese fan from its historic past to its present honoured and dignified supremacy in the "Land of the Rising Sun," and thence to its very equivocal position over here, where more often than not it merely serves as a kind of decorative hallmark of "high art

in the home," is one of those anomalies which might almost be called an instance of the process of unnatural selection. That our mania for "spots of colour" in our rooms, often pitchforked, as it were, on to the walls and there transfixed in more or less wild positions and combinations, is answerable for the degradation of that which in its native environment is a thing of beauty and a joy, is self-evident. The wily "Jap," finding that the more garish and crude he makes his wares for the European market the better they sell, turns out by the thousand and tens of thousand things he would not insult the taste of the meanest of his countrymen by offering them, and far removed in colouring and design from those beautiful samples which reached us first in England some twenty years ago. It is a humiliating contrast to compare these now, alas! almost extinct specimens of the fan with some of the latest developments in this line; such, for instance (quoting the most atrocious outrage yet seen and let us hope in all charity destined only for nursery decoration), as a map of the globe, or a portrait of royalty or statesman stuck on to improve (?) an otherwise inoffensive little self-coloured screen, smacking rather of "Brummagem" than of Japan!

It is a far cry from these modern travesties of Japanese art to the origin of the fan, whose invention was long claimed by the Chinese (who are nothing if not ancient), and who dated it as far back as the eleventh century before the Christian era. But the discoveries of Egyptologists have, among other disconcerting testimonies to the prior claim of Egypt for a vastly more remote historic past, brought to light the sticks of what had undoubtedly been a feather-fan, in which the holes bored for the insertion of each feather were plainly visible. This interesting little witness to an antique civilisation, now in the Boulak Museum, was found in the tomb of an Egyptian king whose dynasty is computed to have been no later than the sixteenth century B.C.

We may take it for granted, however, that the use of the palm-leaf as a fan needed no particular invention, but must have been a custom among the inhabitants of the lands of its growth from time immemorial; yet it seems a sufficiently safe inference to conclude

that to such born artists in decorative design as the Japanese it first occurred to idealise as well as utilise it, while to their pre-eminent predilection for paper may be traced the virtual invention of the "ogi," or paper folding-fan. The shape, by a pretty phantasy, is considered an emblem of the one and only mountain of Japan, and was supposed to have been evolved from a fancied resemblance to it when held open and downwards; this in its turn being a symbol of eternity, because the sticks radiating from a common centre, the beginning of life, are capable of infinite extension into space.

Transcendental Fusiyama, the peerless mountain, figures in the landscape decorations of all sorts and conditions of Japanese fans; whether portrayed with magic touch by such supreme artists as Hokusai, Korin, and Ritsuo, on costly cherished specimens that are mounted and hung on the walls as pictures, or vaguely outlined on the poorest samples of the paper tribe, it is omnipresent!

Another characteristic emblem, the *swastika* (the oldest symbol known the wide world over), in conjunction with the large red circular sun, is often to be found on the iron battle fans of the ancients. Incongruous to our notions of warfare they played an important rôle in Japan, specially in those long and bitter civil wars which have been likened to our Wars of the Roses; while it is on record that even as recently as thirty years ago a Japanese naval commander carried one into action! Standard-bearers bore aloft huge fans, depending from bamboos, which they guarded as zealously as do our ensigns the regimental colours. Soldiers found them an admirable means of defence at close quarters, and the strolling players and wrestlers, who were forbidden by law to carry any other weapon, were able to defend themselves against all comers. When it is remembered that these wrestlers have always aimed and trained to be as fat as possible, it is evident that on this subject also our ideas are somewhat at variance with theirs! The most deadly instrument doubtless is the dagger fan, in its polished case of lacquer, which is manipulated with as great dexterity in the too frequent operation known as the *hari-kari*, or happy dispatch, as is its peaceful prototype in the amenities of everyday life.

Of the complexities of use and multiplicities of type of Japanese fan it is impossible to give more than the merest hint. If we turn to the Court we find, from the state fan of the Empress, with its exquisite decoration of the royal emblem of the chrysanthemum, to that of the meanest dependent, each has its distinctive use and prescribed occasion, even to the manner of holding it at a certain angle when shut, in accordance with rigid rules of Court etiquette, which are far too intricate for any mere outsider to comprehend. There is perhaps one English woman, and one only, to whom these things are no mystery. Mrs. Yoshitana Sannomiya is a cosmopolitan, who, having married the master of the ceremonies of the Imperial Court of Japan, has been for many years the confidential friend and adviser of the Empress, with whom she is such a favourite that she even has entrance to her Majesty's bed-chamber, to which no other woman of Japan save of the blood-royal has such access.

That fans are in great requisition by the men over there is evident when one learns that the gift of a more or less sumptuous fan is *de rigueur* from the bride to the bridegroom on

their wedding; but the sort in ordinary male use is large, generally of paper and decorated with flowered diapers on a white background. Actors put fans to a number of purposes beside actual stage use. They send out the *surimono* to advertise a change of name, address or play; they issue the *kaké-ogi*, or hanging fan, as a circular with verses redounding to the fame and glory of the person thereon named, and asking his patrons for their continued support, and they sometimes carry the *chukei* (which is curved when shut up) on which the crest and stage name are emblazoned. The interlude dancer sports a particularly gay-patterned variety, and although no female actor is allowed on the stage (the men taking the necessary female parts), yet the "geishas" perform at every other sort of entertainment, with whom the fan is an integral part of the dance. As every portion of the body is brought into play except the feet, immense muscular strength is necessary for these dances, which can only be acquired by severe training from early childhood. They require also special gifts of posture, poetry and pantomime in order to represent the gamut of human passions which they invariably depict in part, or entirely, in their presentation.

The tight-rope dancers, who are so justly renowned, again employ a special type of fan of their own, which is supposed to help them preserve their balance.

There are endless customs concerning fans. On the first of the "Mouse" (corresponding to our New Year's Day) it is usual to exchange fans as we do Christmas or New Year's cards, with verses called *Hai-kai* inscribed thereon, and often accompanied by the Japanese emblems of old age, health and plenty, a fir branch, a lobster and rice cake. It is also a social custom among the cultured to ask a friend to write an original verse, or draw a design on a fan as we should invite a contribution to an album. No person in polite society would think of passing anything in the hand that could possibly be handed on the fan, which then must be held at a half-opened angle. In summer ladies use a peculiar "juice-fan," which exhales a pleasant odour, taking the place of our smelling-bottles, and also "waterproof fans," which, constantly dipped in water, cool the air when used. Japanese children, rich and poor, are adepts with the fan, which is given them at an age when an English baby learns to grasp its rattle, and they in their turn place it in the hands of their dolls.

The most popular game, *Ogi Otoshi*, it goes without saying, is devoted to the fan, which has to be thrown from a given distance at a "Cho" or butterfly target balanced on top of a block, which does not seem quite so simple when one finds there are fifty different positions in which the "Cho" can be knocked off, and that a book of rules similar to ours on whist, bézique and the like, has been drawn up for reference.

Returning from the playful to the practical, we find the fan entering into the culinary arrangements, used on a large scale in agriculture and pressed into all sorts of services. Last but not least, it is a valuable accessory in the religious rites and ceremonies of the national worship of Japanese, which, far removed in all else from our notions of belief, yet must commend itself for its teaching, by precept and example, the cardinal virtues of filial love, duty, and obedience.

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