

HOW THE JAPANESE ARRANGE FLOWERS FOR DECORATION.



BOOK reaches me from Japan which is undoubtedly "a thing of beauty," and if it would only lie open, would be "a joy for ever." But the Japanese binding, artistic though it be, renders it pre-eminently inconvenient for reading, or for studying properly the extremely beautiful plates with which Japanese artists have illustrated it. The work

treats of the art of arranging flowers in Japan—an art which in that country has always been regarded as an elegant accomplishment, and by no means an effeminate one. True, the education of ladies of rank is not considered complete without the acquisition of some skill in composing flowers; but the art has been more generally practised by men of culture, whose occupations have spared them leisure for æsthetic pursuits. Priests, philosophers, and men of rank, who, on account of declining years, or from political causes, have retired from a more active life, have been its most enthusiastic patrons and devotees.

The writer of the book in question, Mr. Josiah Conder, who for many years past has been architect to the Imperial Government of Japan, has devoted a long period of study in order to master this most intricate art; an art entirely unknown in Europe, and which it is even difficult to explain to Western minds, for it frequently treats of ideas unfamiliar to them.

There are in Japan a number of different schools for flower arrangement, all of which have rigid rules more or less elaborate or artificial, and are frequently strongly opposed to each other. In his book Mr. Conder has treated principally of the Enshu style of flower arrangement, this being at the same time the most elaborate and the most popular of the more modern schools.

To give an idea of the high esteem in which the art is held, we will cite the following ten virtues, or merits, which are attributed to those engaged in its pursuit, namely:—(1) The privilege of associating with superiors; (2) ease and dignity before men of rank; (3) a serene disposition and forgetfulness of cares; (4) amusement in solitude; (5) familiarity with the nature of plants and trees; (6) the respect of mankind; (7) constant gentleness of character; (8) health of mind and body; (9) a religious spirit; (10) self-abnegation and restraint.

It must be premised that the Japanese term "Hana," translatable as "flower," is applied, in the art under consideration, in a somewhat extended sense compared to that in which it is used in Western countries. It means not only the blossom, but includes the blossom-clad stems and branches of flowering trees and plants, and even the stumps and branches of flowerless trees and shrubs; nay, the branches of certain evergreen trees and flowerless plants hold the highest rank among flowers, such, for example, as the pine, the cedar, the fir, and the maple.

The balance and beauty of line in combination is *par excellence* the distinguishing feature of Japanese floral compositions, and one which gives much scope for the display of skill and character in design. The stems play a part quite as important as the flowers and leaves. There is not, it seems, in Japan that profusion of wild flowers to which the in-

habitants of Western Europe are accustomed, though it produces many beautiful flowering trees; hence probably arose the use of branches as an integral portion of floral arrangement.

Line in Japanese, more than in any other style of painting, has developed a distinctive power of its own, and has become a vehicle for conveying the spirit and character of the artist. And these people possess the keenest perception for the lines of beauty and harmony which underlie natural forms. The European florist concerns himself with no such lineal disposition in his flower compositions: mass, colour, and geometrical arrangements of the stems according to certain arbitrary rules of harmony and taste alone receive his attention.

The artistic arrangement of flowering branches and plants in vases and other receptacles is attributed by certain Japanese writers to an Indian origin; the same Buddhist doctrine which forbids the wanton sacrifice of animal life is said to have suggested the gathering of flowers liable to rapid destruction in a tropical climate, and prolonging their life by a careful preservation. The flowers are always arranged with regard to the season, and some arrangements are only permitted at certain hours of the day. The arrangements for certain celebrations and for all the great feasts of the year are prescribed with great minuteness.

Variety in harmony is the leading principle of Japanese design, as it was in Early Christian and even in Pagan art. In the flower compositions the central lines of each group of stems receive first attention. There are three, five, and seven-lined arrangements. Legends of the early times of Buddhism exist, tending to explain the use of seven lines as the most perfect number for floral disposition, and also to illustrate a certain philosophical spirit which underlies the whole of the art. One very charming feature of this Japanese method of flower treatment is, that the natural locality of production is never lost sight of, and that there is an attempt to reproduce it as nearly as possible.

The earliest form of arrangement, called a "Shin-no-hana," is formed of a stiff central vertical stem, around which the flowers are arranged. It is still in use for flower offerings placed before religious shrines. An arrangement called "Rikkwa" was in use at the same time, of which the central stem was curved. Flowers are classified according to their seasons, and also to certain associations attributed to them. The plum is called the oldest of flowers; it is very important, and greatly esteemed. A beautiful illustration in Mr. Conder's book shows the "Plum Viewing," which is one of the spring diversions of the Japanese, who go out in companies at different seasons when different flowers are in bloom, to look at them growing in all their beauty. In this picture the strong and rugged character of these trees is most excellently given, as, indeed, throughout the Japanese artists seem to catch the very character and individuality of the various trees and plants they represent.

Poets and artists in Japan are fond of comparing the plum with the cherry, which comes rather later in the spring—the cherry being prized chiefly for its blossom; the plum for its picturesque form of growth. Dwarf plum trees are a favourite ornament for rooms in spring. There was for many years a spot in the north of Tokio where grew a most wonderful plum tree, which was called "The Recumbent Dragon," from its strange shape. Fruit from this tree was annually presented to the Shogun. It has now succumbed to extreme

old age, but has been replaced by others chosen for their strange and crawling form. The boughs of these curiously shaped trees enter greatly into the composition of the "Rikkwa," or crooked, arrangement. The plum is, in Japan, an imported flower; the cherry is indigenous, though the importance of the cherry as a flower is of later date.

At the "Cherry Viewing" wine is drunk, in allusion to the legend of its petals having fallen into the cup of the Emperor Richim as he was disporting himself in a pleasure-boat, this incident calling his attention to the beauty of the hitherto neglected flower.

The wistaria is another favourite flower in Japanese arrangement. On account of its purple colour it is not used at weddings, purple being considered as mourning. It is usually painted in combination with the pheasant. The peony is the flower of rank and aristocracy, with which the peacock and the lion are combined. The lotus is the flower specially dedicated to the spirit world, and used at the festivals of the dead. The iris is also largely used, being combined in art with water birds. The chrysanthemum, often wrongly considered as the national flower of Japan—a position which really belongs to the cherry—is also greatly esteemed as the principal flower of autumn. There are said to be two hundred and sixty-nine colour varieties of chrysanthemums in Japan. Some of these are called by very poetical names, such as "Silver World," "Companion of the Moon," "Blessings of Majesty," "Die of the Dew," "Waves in the Morning Sun," and so forth. In art this flower is associated with the crane, which is regarded as the royal bird of Japan.

The paucity of flowering trees and plants in autumn has led the Japanese to make much of certain simple plants, comparatively unimportant in themselves, but gathering importance and interest in combination. Since every month in the year is associated with a special blossom, some flowers had also to be found for the autumn months, and of these the chief are the morning glory, the eularia japonica, two species of valerian, and a species of carnation. The deer is specially associated with the autumn time. Maple trees also belong to autumn, and their reddening leaves cause them to be regarded as flowers. The snowy landscape, by a pretty Japanese fancy, is also regarded as a flowery scene, and parties go to view such scenes in winter.

Certain flowers are used at particular feasts. Others, chiefly poisonous, are considered ominous, and not used in floral decorations, of which the fundamental idea is that the whole character of the plant or tree used should be considered. The treatment adopted may be likened to the method followed in distributing curved foliage in architectural panels. The surface of the water in which the flowers are placed is supposed to represent the soil in which they grow; there must therefore be an appearance of strength and stability in this part of the arrangement, as floral growth and vitality must be expressed. In the distribution of the composition an equal-sided arrangement must be avoided, although an idea of balance must be subtly conveyed.

The original model for all forms of arrangement is the three-lined one. In this the principal line, as its name imparts, is the central one, and the longest; the other two are called secondary and tertiary, the former of which should be about half, the latter about a quarter, as long as the principal. These are arranged in double curves on either side the principal. The five-lined arrangement

has two lines arranged between these three, one between the principal and secondary, called the "support," and one between the principal and tertiary, called the "sub-principal." The seven-lined arrangement has two more lines, one between the support and the tertiary, called the "trunk" line, and one between the sub-principal and the secondary, called the "side" line. Balance and harmony without repetition are always required.

A list exists of all those errors which should be carefully avoided in floral arrangements. Among these are:—Cross-cutting—that is to say, where the different lines of a composition intersect each other; view-cutting, where the smaller stems of a branch cut across the parent stem. Exception to this rule is made in the case of the plum, of which this is a characteristic. Another error is parallelism, *i.e.*, when two or more stems of equal length run parallel to each other. It is called "window-cutting" when stems or branches form looped openings. "Lattice-cutting" is when numerous stems cross each other so as to produce an impression of lattice-work. Every one of these is regarded as a mistake.

A trailing appendage, called a streamer, forms part of many arrangements; but there is to be on no account a streamer on each side. These lines have various poetic and allegorical names, alluding to the philosophy on which the art is based.

The Japanese apply the terms male and female to various inanimate objects—the stronger and more powerful being called male; the weaker, female. These must always be carefully balanced in floral design.

The various lines or directions imparted to plants and branches of trees on the above principle of disposition are obtained, first, by a careful selection of suitable material; next, by twisting, bending, and building together; lastly, by cutting and clipping off defective parts. To those who object to such bruising and forcing as a violation of nature, the partisans of the Enshū school reply that the conditions and surroundings of branches are entirely changed when they are divided from their parent tree, and used for the embellishment of architectural interiors; and art must aid nature in such cases, even at the risk of shortening vitality. Some arrangements must last only a short time.

Intimately connected with the character of the floral design is the form of the vessels used to hold the flowers, these vessels being of various shapes and of different materials. The most ancient form in use was a long-necked earthen or bronze vessel; but the difficulty of balancing such high arrangements led to the use of broader and shorter vases, and to a corresponding lowering of flower composition. The ordinary wide-mouthed bronze vessel, of which there are an infinite number of different shapes, is called a "Hana-ike," and is said to have been suggested by certain Buddhist characters. Shallow vessels are also used, chiefly for the arrangement of water plants and grasses. Some of these shallow vessels are called "horse-tubs," and resemble them in miniature, from a tradition that a great Japanese general once, when on the march, used an ordinary horse-tub for arranging flowers.

The famous Regent, Yoshimasa, is said to have been the first to employ bamboo baskets as receptacles for flowers, and these are not placed on stands like the porcelain and bronze vessels, but are generally adopted for suspended arrangements of flowers. To the Regent's patronage is also attributed the use of bamboo vases for holding flowers, which are of most varied shapes, and are called by most fanciful names.

There are many forms of vessels and baskets used for hooking against the wall or for suspension from the ceiling. The boat-shaped

vessel plays a most important part in Japanese life; thus, one is called the "homeward bound" boat; another the "outward bound"; a third the "stationary"; and in each of these a different class of floral arrangement must be made. The first of these is used when the occasion is one of welcome; the second, when it is one of farewell; the third, when a guest is staying in the house, to give him the feeling that he is not expected to remove. The form and character of the design and decoration of the vessels is carefully selected with reference to the nature of the flower composition.

A list of artistic virtues is given, said to have been pointed out by Yoshimasa. Thus, for instance, a character of affectionate attachment is expressed by a bronze sand bowl containing a pine branch entwined by a wistaria; a character of serenity is expressed by a hanging boat-shaped vessel of bronze containing white chrysanthemums, supposed to suggest a loaded boat stationary in port; a character of veneration is expressed by a pine or evergreen placed in a bronze vase engraved with a stork, both stork and pine being associated with the idea of venerable old age. Receptacles, however rare and valuable they may be, if intended for other uses, must not be employed as flower vessels.

Various forms of fasteners are employed to hold the flowers in position, and there are rules for their employment. Some of these are purely ornamental, the real fastener being hidden under the water. The bronze crabs, dragons, and other strange forms that we often find in Japanese shops in Europe, are really flower fasteners in their native land. There are also rigid rules prescribing the amount of water for use in the vessels at different seasons. In spring, vases should be about nine-tenths full, and in summer they should be full to overflowing; in winter only four-fifths full, and in very cold weather only seven-tenths. The position of the flowers used in decorating apartments is also carefully prescribed.

All important rooms in Japanese houses, large or small, are provided with an ornamental recess, called "tokonoma." The floral composition is always placed on the floor of the "tokonoma," unless it be a hanging arrangement, in which case it is suspended to a side pillar of this recess. The rolling pictures, called "kakemono," which always decorate Japanese rooms, invariably hang upon the back wall of this "tokonoma," and correspond, like the floral decorations, to the seasons of the year, being changed accordingly.

It is held of the greatest importance that the floral arrangement should not clash with the pictures, and there are rules laid down as to the relations which exist between them. For example—If the picture is long, the floral decoration must be kept low; but when a broad low picture is used, the floral composition must be high and full. If the flowers are allowed to cover any portion of the picture, they must never hide the signature of the artist. The centre, ends, and tassel of the ornamental roller forming the bottom of the picture must be left visible. If the picture represent figures, the faces must not be hidden by the flowers. Harmony must also be carefully observed between the character of the picture and the flower, and it is absolutely necessary to avoid using the same flowers as those represented in the picture. If the painting represents flowering plants, the floral decoration should be made with branches of trees, and *vice versa*.

The association of flowers with certain birds and animals, before alluded to, must be preserved. A painting of eagles requires maples; of horses, wild grass and flowers; tigers must have bamboos; dragons, pine branches; and paintings of children require many coloured flowers. The bamboo, it may be noted, is

used both as a tree and as a plant. It should never be placed in bamboo vases.

There are several points of ceremonial and etiquette insisted on in connection with the art of arranging flowers, and a sort of ritual is prescribed with regard to the examination of floral designs, which must be carefully adhered to. Certain epithets are considered to belong to certain classes of flowers. It is improper to hold a fan in the hand when regarding a floral composition. A guest is often invited by his host to make an extempore arrangement of flowers, for which purpose he is presented with suitable stems and branches, and all needful utensils and implements. If the vase provided to hold the flowers is exceedingly rare and valuable, it is polite for the guest to show diffidence in making use of it. If a small quantity of flowers is provided, the guest must do his best, and on no account ask for more. When the arrangement is completed, the host and the other guests, who have remained in the adjoining room, return and inspect the work. The guest must leave the flower scissors near to the arrangement, as a silent request to correct faults. He must also apologise for the imperfection of the work, and beg that the whole should be removed. The host must refuse, saying that the result is everything that could be desired. Before departing, however, the guest must destroy the arrangement unless especially requested not to do so. In making presents of cut flowers for floral arrangements, they should not be trimmed, or they will look as though they had been previously used. The sender must consider how they are capable of arrangement, and must send plants and other materials which are necessary accessories. The stems of plants sent should be wrapped in paper.

There are special forms of paper-wrappings used, the one for trees and the other for flowers. Certain flowers are used at certain festivals. At weddings, red and white flowers are used in combination, red being a male colour and representing the bridegroom, white being female, and representing the bride. Yellow branches are not used at weddings, nor any purple flowers. For coming of age festivals, strong and vigorous arrangements are used with a large proportion of young branches and boughs. For festivals of promotion in rank, full-blown flowers are placed above boughs. At tea ceremonials floral arrangements should be exceedingly small and simple, and usually of a rustic character.

The colours of flowers have both respective rank and sex. The idea of respective rank is applied principally to coloured flowers of the same species. In most cases the white ranks first; but there are exceptions to this rule. Among the colours, red, purple, pink, and variegated colours are male; blue, yellow, and white are female. Colours which do not harmonise must be separated by green leaves or white flowers. The idea of sex is applied also to the direction of branches in floral compositions; the right hand of the arrangement is east, the left west, the front south, the back north, and the east and south direction are regarded as male, the west and north as female.

Any change that would lead to the decay of this beautiful art of flower arrangement would indeed be a misfortune; but changes in a Western direction are proceeding so rapidly in Japan that we cannot know how long this art may continue to flourish unspoiled. For the present it certainly conforms most accurately to Ruskin's definition of design, as—"That power in any art work which has purpose other than that of imitation, and which is designed, composed, and separated to that end. It implies the rejection of some ends and the insistence upon others with a given object."

HELEN ZIMMERN.