

Japanese Botany.



Other people ever combined so intimately as do the Japanese a love of Nature, of art, and of the grotesque. Many of their arts gratify the three tastes together in a highly interesting manner—the art of dwarfing and training trees, for instance. One of the commonest products of this art may be a pine tree or an oak, two or three hundred years old, gnarled, knotted, mossy, picturesque—and not 2ft. high! It is not merely that, either. Every leaf, every branch and twig, every knot and wrinkle of bark is tiny in exact proportion, and to produce such an effect as this demands the study of a lifetime and initiation into many secrets. The mere dwarfing, too, is only part of the task. The tree is trained and tended, checked and persuaded, till it takes the most picturesque possible form; the effects of storm, age, and accident are produced exactly; and there are gardens in Japan full of ancient trees, rocks, hills, waterfalls, and bridges, and not 3yds. in area! Often roots are trained grotesquely out of the ground, making fantastic arches and curls and twists before reaching their tips down at last toward the necessary nourishment. And though these eccentricities are designed with a view to quaintness of effect, they are not mere distortions, as so often supposed. For they have their originals in Nature in many parts of Japan, where the earth is volcanic, and where very often a mere thin layer of fertile soil overlies the solid lava-rock beneath, so that roots of many trees acquire quaint and unusual habits, and, because of the impossibility of growing downward through the rock, show themselves above ground in many surprising forms.

We reproduce some sketches by a Japanese artist, in which the quaintnesses of tree-dwarfing and flower-arrangement are carried a step farther than ever in actual fact, the drawings being ingeniously twisted into human and animal forms.

First we have the broken stump of an ancient pine, with its roots well out of the ground, just as we have been describing. But this ragged stump would seem to be changing to a bounding and hilarious pet dog, with a bow tied on his neck and a little sleigh-bell hanging from it. He seems to be

springing up to snap at the butterflies that pass overhead, and such is his delighted energy—very vigorously expressed, by the way—that bow and bell have swung round disregarded to the back of his neck.

Next comes a sketch with several points of interest. It represents a bronze vase, in which is growing a dwarfed sago-palm—*Cycas revoluta*, in the words of the botanist. The palm takes the form of the head of a cockatoo or crested parrakeet; and if you consider the thing as a whole, the vase with its claw-feet suggests a ludicrously stunted and podgy body, like unto the shape of neither the

fowls of the air nor the beasts of the field, nor the fishes that abide in the mighty deep. Sticking in the mould to the right, and close under the cockatoo's beak, stand three little objects that seem at first to have little to do either with a cockatoo or a sago-palm. They are iron nails used as a tonic for the plant. For if a Japanese gardener finds any plant or tree sickly or drooping he has a dozen varieties of medicine for it; and when a palm needs a tonic, an iron nail or two pushed into the soil about the root, and there allowed to rust, is as good as anything.



"BEWARE OF THE DOG."



"PALM AND PARRAKEET."

Our third sketch is of a gnarled old plum-trunk, knotted and broken, but putting forth shoots still and bearing blossom. In form



"A DEMON PLUM-TREE."

it suggests a horned demon, or *oni*, protruding his tongue and chasing some unhappy victim, with a switch in each hand. One must remember that the original sketch is in colour, and the tongue is bright red. It is represented by a slip of red paper, inscribed with a poem, and hung on the stem. The production of short and elegant verses impromptu is a polite accomplishment of learned men and artists in Japan; and in the spring picnics, when hundreds go forth to delight in the sight of the blossoming trees—cherry, plum, and peach—that make glad all Japan, it is customary for such verses to



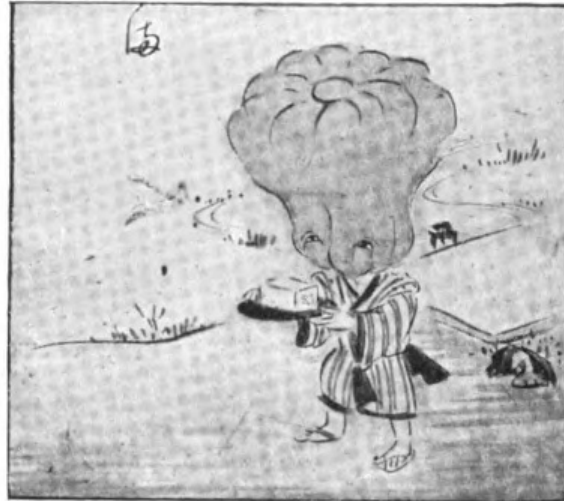
"A 'LION' CHRYSANTHEMUM."

be written in honour of particular trees and hung upon those trees by the writers.

Next we have a quaint conceit—that of a chrysanthemum bursting, in the shape of a lion, through its protective thatch of straw and fiercely trampling it under foot. It is customary to protect valuable outdoor plants with straw coverings during the nights of winter and spring to save the blossoms from frost and to prevent any possible breaking of stems by the weight of snow. Here the leonine chrysanthemum, angry at its confinement, thrusts its way into the open air. The lion of Japanese art, it may be mentioned here, is less like a lion than a rampageous poodle. It is a legendary and traditional

figure, copied from the ancient fancy pictures in Chinese encyclopædias, the lion being equally a stranger to the climes of China and Japan. So the old Japanese artist, never having seen the animal, faithfully followed the traditional outline, and produced a very active and vigorous creature, curly as to tail and mane, and decorated with woolly tufts here and there, as fancy dictated, rather like a lap-dog out of a nightmare.

The two drawings which follow are less interesting. One shows us a certain edible seaweed, dressed in Japanese costume, rising



"AN INDUSTRIOUS GOURD."



"A LITTLE DRESSED SEAWEED."

from the waves ; and the other represents a serving-man with a vast gourd for a head. He carries a box on a tray, and he seems to wear his eyes very low.

With the seventh drawing we are in the midst of the supernatural once again. Here is a ghost, a typical Japanese ghost, rising from the light bamboo frame on which the wisteria is trained, and formed of a spray of that flower. The hair, the eyes, the mouth, the hands—all are of leaves, and there is a fine flowing beard of the trailing blossom. The wisteria grows in Japan as it grows nowhere else. Its magnificent trails of blossom, red or purple, hang a yard long and more, and in the gardens where it is especially cultivated they hang in thousands.



Original from "GHOST."

called in Japan. Again the hands are formed by leaves, and the mouth is wide enough for the largest shriek any reasonable ghost can aspire to.

Next we have an iris rising from a marsh,



"A GHOSTLY PEONY."

across which a foot-bridge is carried. The iris is dressed as an elegantly-attired lady, with hanging sleeves and large *obi* or sash. The particular species of iris here shown—*Iris kampfarii*—grows in marvellous abundance in the marshes of Japan. It is a splendid flower, scarcely to be cultivated at all in England, except with very exceptional care, but covering damp spaces in thousands in its native country. Hokusai made a famous drawing of the great marsh of Mikawa, with its zig-zag bridge and its acres of blossoming iris.

One of the most striking of the series follows this. Rising from within a fence, an orchid on a long, curly tendril stares aghast at the notice-board that threatens penalties to trespassers. It has sprung up in the night, perhaps, as is the way of some orchids, and is disturbed by the reflection that for that reason it may be regarded as a trespasser.



"AN IRIS COLLEEN."

But, trespasser or not, it is taking the form of a *rokurokubi*—a terrible monster! For the *rokurokubi* is a human being, with the weird faculty of sending its head off on long expeditions during sleep—perhaps miles away, on the end of a long, long, long, and very thin neck. It is a monster derived from Chinese folk-lore, and it is a great terror to naughty little children in Japan. For no naughty little boy goes in disgrace to bed without apprehensions of seeing the ghastly



"A TRESPASSING ORCHID."

head come in at the door or window at the end of its serpentine neck, peering and glaring round corners, over screens, and everywhere. A sad, terrible goblin is the *rokurokubi!* And in ordinary life he may be quite a quiet, respectable person, for it is only at night while he is asleep that his head goes floating and glaring and peeping away at the end of that terrible neck.



"A GOBLIN CACTUS."

Next we have a cactus—an ugly and queer cactus enough—in the character of a goblin, or *bakemono*. The goblin also is ugly and curious, goggle-eyed and turtle-handed.

Here is another iris, a cultivated iris this time, growing in a wooden trough and bent by a strong breeze. This is another ghost—rather a grinning, turnip-headed sort of spectre, this time, but waving its arms impressively, and very terrible on the whole.

After the ghost, a dragon. For this is a branch of *momiji*—maple as we call it—reaching downward over a little waterfall, but it is given the aspect of a storm-

life-like that it needed but eyes to fly away. But when he mentioned his reason, disrespectful people laughed. Whereupon Kanaoka, losing his temper, seized his brush and dashed the eyes in; when instantly there was



"AN IRIS BANSHEE."



"THE MAPLE-DRAGON."

a clap of thunder, and the great dragon went flashing and roaring from the picture through the roof amid lightnings and clouds, and was never seen again. And if you doubt the story you can go to the place where the picture was painted, and see for yourself that the dragon is not there to this very day!