THE "NEW-OLD SCHOOL OF JAPANESE ART"—
LANDSCAPES THAT HAVE THE MODERN
SPIRIT WITH TRADITIONAL METHODS.

In the quiet reserve and a certain cold beauty nothing could be more Japanese than the way in which the modern Japanese landscapes were presented at the Fall Paris Salon. At first glimpse, one not familiar with the Japanese point of view about art was too surprised at the reticence and lack of modern enterprise in presentation to fully realize the extraordinary beauty of this new landscape work, with its simplicity of composition and a sensitiveness as great as the simplicity.

As is inevitable with the Japanese artists, the few pictures were presented with proper environment. Some very rare old objects, which had furnished the simple but beautiful houses of Japanese peasants, some prints from the fine collection of Camondo and some precious bits of old Japanese ceramics, with a few well-placed, delicate-hued, long-stemmed chrysanthemums, formed the background for the Exposition of the twenty-two paintings shown by two of the best known modern Japanese painters. And yet this small exhibit, at once so simple and reticent, was classed by the French art critics as the most serious interest of the Salon—simple pages, as though taken from a sketch book, yet done with a sureness of touch and a sentiment for truth, for all the most difficult subtlety of truth, that placed them among the most important works of our modern school of landscape painters.

Traced by the same swift and accurate brush, there was a young priestess, such as one would see officiating ingenuously in the temples of Ise back in the heart of Japan, belonging to a class of young girls, who, like the Athenian maidens, consecrate themselves for a certain number of months every year to the gods of their especial region; and near this, two young athletes struggling in Jiu-Jitsu, suggesting a rare old print of Hok'‐sai, and then a group of naked fishermen, and beyond this landscapes, always full of temperament and charm, and a poetical finesse, which appealed at once to both literary and artistic appreciation.

The pictures of Yokoyama, Taikau, and Hishida-Shuinso, although framed as simply as possible, and of the roughest of materials, hold the eye and caress the mind by a surface of unapproachable purity of expression, coupled with brush work surpris-
MODERN JAPANESE LANDSCAPES

ingly definite, and all done without canvas or "board," but on a stretch of thin, fine, rice silk.

Kio'-sai, the last pupil of Hok'-sai, was one of the most ardent advocates of the wonderful atmospheric effects to be gained from the use of glazed paper. "It has," to quote from this famous Japanese artist, "the charm of delicacy combined with a supreme distinction." And he had his own receipt for glazing paper in a way to get the most interesting results. He used to pass it through a boiling preparation of gelatine and alum, and while the silk was wet and elastic from the heat, the surface was made uneven by rubbing with a brush. This is one of the very old methods of securing that interesting, uneven surface, and at present its use is confined to the two artists under discussion.

These two men live with their pupils out in the cherry-blossom edge of Tokyo, in the simplest Japanese fashion, ignoring modern European civilization, and defending the ways and traditions of their forefathers against all intrusion. They scorn our new preparations of tube paints, of canvases and stiff "boards," and yet they are expressing, in the landscapes being exhibited during the present year throughout Europe, the most ultra-modern point of view in the presentation of nature as it is.

Because of certain reserve and formality, it would be unjust to hold against these men that their art has not the literal living quality of European art. It would be difficult to find a more luminous atmosphere in a Corot or in our own Tryon pictures than in some of these modern Japanese landscapes. In their sincerity it sometimes seems that they even go too far, and examine the results of the camera, and ask themselves if that impersonal eye could have seen better than the vision of the old masters. The artists of New-Old-School of Japan—such is the name of these innovators and traditionalists,—seem to see before them nature as it really exists in Japan, and to so present it in their landscapes; at the same time, to hold in their presentation and technique, as far as possible, to the formality and suggestiveness of old Japanese art.

Naturally, if one is studying all of modern Japanese art much will be found in this transition period that shows timidity and inexperience, making one feel that the traditional style has been lost and
that the modern expression is still a tangled underbrush. But in the
work of the men appearing in Paris during the last year, although
many of the subjects can be traced to the old inspiration, still the mod-
ern feeling of presenting art is there,—the methods of elimination
rather than conventionalization. The sentiment of the modern Jap-
anese artist is growing more chimerical and more tender. This is
especially noticeable in one modern landscape exhibited in Paris at
the Fall Salon. About a bunch of high rocks in the background of the
picture is a moving trail of serpentine vapor; the rocks rise high
and sharp, yet in spite of the clear cut outlines they seem to be hanging
in the clouds, a silver silhouette against a gray ground. The sug-
gestion of drifting vapor, the great mass of rocks, the sense of space
and height, all give one an astonishing, convincing impression of
reality. It is not a painting, but the thing itself, miles of the earth
held in a frame.

In a second mountain scene, there is the same amazing presenta-
tion of a natural condition. The background of the picture consists
of two distinct mountain peaks, one very sombre, the other luminous
gleaming with crusted snow. Wraithlike figures of mountaineers,
advance through a greenish fog, so thin, so ghostlike, that you would
need the eye of an Alpine climber to believe their existence possible.
It is a picture that changes and grows as one watches it, and permits
one's personality to become sympathetic with it, a quality which is a
part of Turner's great genius, and which in a smaller way Mr. Harry
Snell, among our own painters, has.

AMONG the landscapes which boldly present this new inter-
pretation of nature are the pictures illustrating this article.
One shows an early morning, all yellow-gold in tone, while on
limpid water a bark is drawn with extreme precision, seeming to
move in the transparency of the air. A restless movement of water
marks the wake of the little craft, and a line of foam, from the wake,
lies vaguely on the sands of the beach. Another, shows a winter sea,
weighted with wind-swept gray clouds; the low waves without foam,
creep up and flatten out in jets of fine mist. Through everything
vibrates the mournful hushed tone of the sound of the dark green
winter sea.

But even greater than the sea poems which were shown in this exhi-
bition are the subjects which are drenched with mist and fog, moonlight or twilight, where technique is lost sight of, and where the imagination is stirred as when only great artistic feeling is involved. And whether the red sun is shining through a gray veil of fog, or whether an entire sea is dimly seen through quivering mists, there is at least never any doubt as to the inspiration in the mind that presented the subject, even though skilful drawing had not entered into his naïve heart.

In one wonderful bit of poetry, a landscape by Hishida-Shuinso, all that is encompassed in the narrow frame is a group of Japanese pines, four slender, needle-like trees, appearing and disappearing through a fine gossamer mist, that does not seem to have been painted, but to have been drawn like a cobweb over the trees and clouds. There is no background, no foreground, no middle distance, not a rule that belongs to an ordinary picture has been observed, yet the landscape is a thrilling, exquisite work of art.

And the poetry of these Japanese landscapes is not exclusively in the inspiration and presentation. Every old-time Japanese picture carries in some one corner a little decorative verse, the "hai'-kai." Many of these have been most beautifully translated by Lefcadio Hearn. To the Japanese mind, which is so exquisitely harmonious, the "hai'-kai," is an integral part of the picture. It is often the inspiration of the picture, undying words of some famous poet. The "hai'-kai," old and modern, is an extremely simple expression of equally simple and beautiful thoughts of the love of nature, the love of children, or the love of country. A very lovely one, decorating one of the Salon pictures, is strangely enough suggestive of Verlaine. It is easily translated in French, but almost inevitably slips into prose in English:

"There are far away dream villages, where one may never fish nor gather flowers, but there is always a quiet peaceful evening, and the poetry of the moonlight."

Another picture at the exhibit shows a rainy day; a light Oriental rain steady and slow-falling leaves the wood glistening, causes the roofs to shine; the peasants, in the soaking streets, are seen in their huge straw umbrella hats, and here is the "hai'-kai," which appears on the picture, which sounds like an exquisite eighteenth century roundelet of Büson:
"The spring-time is full of rain, and the streets are silhouetted with figures draped in shadowy water-cloaks, and protected by wide hats of thick straw."

Another moonlight picture carries a "hai'-kai," which is hardly more than a delicate poetic thought, "The light from a rain-hidden moon is everywhere diffused in a delicate pallor."

By the very literal mind which does not always approach poetry with imagination, the "hai'-kai" has been accused of being insignificant; but so, from the same point of view, could one call the delicate verses of Verlaine or Mallarmé insignificant, or the illusive sketches of Whistler. Fineness is not insignificance, and these exquisitely suggestive lines of poetry are full of inspiration, perfect in their harmony with Japanese art. Utterly simple, yet fragrant with memories of the wonder and mystery of the first snow fall is the following "hai'-kai": "The first snow in winter! yet unless one dreams in it, why should it fall?"
MOONLIGHT. BY HISHIDA-SHUNISO
TWILIGHT. BY HISHIDA-SHUNISO
THE WAKE OF THE SHIP
BY YOKOYAMA-TAIKAN
PINES ON THE RIVER EDGE
BY HISHIDA-SHUNSHO