

Fin du Siècle: Japan 1750-1800; France 1850-1900

There is a drawing on the opposite page. The face is Japanese but it is not the type of face that appears in "Japanese Art." It is not even a good drawing, but it might be called a good cartoon.

There is a history of wood-blocks and color-prints before this field was commercialized in Japan. The Chinese and Tibetans had their wood-blocks. Sacred scriptures have been published with illustrations. But both scriptures and art in general have been reserved for the poor.

The policy of splendid isolation raised the standard of living for the masses in Japan. They were not permitted to spend their money in ostentation apart from religion. They could not even buy ornate garments. But they were permitted diversions and they had them.

The theater began to play a larger and larger part in the social life. And costume began to play a larger and larger part in the theater. And artists of the people began to draw inspirations therefrom and to draw posters. So we have a poster art, perhaps limited and at first more like animated cartoons.

But the artists of the people had other things to admire, especially women. They were not confined to patronesses or ladies of the court. They found beauty everywhere, especially in coiffures; in the texture, design and folds of garments; in little or big things that excited the people. They drew these things. And the artist, the block-printer and the color-animists were brought together by the publishers and a new mass-art appeared.

Not only were the themes different, social and homely, but the creators were not impeded by a host of conventions, especially those of the Chinese Six Principles. Instead of emptiness they used inks and colors. At first they did not receive much pay but the more the common man had the chance to admire, the more he had the chance to purchase.

Thus **Ukiyo-ye**—painting in the Transient Scene. The everyday life became the source of inspiration, aesthetics and even profits.

We can now turn to France after 1848. The Bourbons are no more. The Tricolor is triumphant. And the bourgeoisie stand out preeminent in a society which has glorified the nobility by law and the peasantry by fiction. The middle classes want to show off. They naturally turn to those who can satisfy their needs.

But the creative artists also feel the removal of old conventions. They want to give the world what is in them. They challenge the old ideas of space, color and perspective. But even more they challenge the limitations on themes.

So they turn to the theater, to the world of pleasures, to the curves found not only in the folds of dresses but in the nude bodies of women. A real revolution is accomplished where the political revolution may be failed. And it is taken more seriously too, except by historians.

Now the arts of Japan have progressed and integrated. The arts of France have progressed and integrated. Will the answer be found in "Fin du Siècle, États Unis, 1950-2000?"