

Japan lacquer by E. Gilbertson 1894

ALTHOUGH Japanese lacquer work has always been held in high estimation, until the latter half of the present century Europe had, in reality, no knowledge either of any perfect specimens, or of the amazing variety of styles of the more famous masters. It is very doubtful even whether among connoisseurs there was any clear idea as to the difference between Chinese and Japanese lacquer work. We can hardly be surprised that many people assumed, and still assume, that because the Japanese derived so many of their arts from China and Corea,

lacquer working was among them. Rein, in his *Industries of Japan*, expresses his belief that the Japanese derived both the lacquer tree and the art of lacquering, from their western neighbours about the commencement of the 3rd century, or after their first expedition to Corea.

But the only evidence he brings in support of his opinion is a statement that the *Rhus vernicifera* (the lacquer tree) has not been found growing wild anywhere in Japan, and that the methods and utensils used there are precisely the same as those which have been used for centuries in China. It would have been much more to the purpose had he quoted some piece of Chinese lacquer as early in date as the best authenticated examples, undoubtedly of native work, existing in Japan, or even pieces of Chinese lacquer of more recent date, comparable with Japanese work. It is not easy to understand why the Japanese, readily admitting their obligations to China and Corea for their literature, painting, sculpture, pottery, should put forward unfounded pretensions to this one art.

It is true, as he says, that Japanese history before the Christian era is of doubtful authenticity as to many details, but is that of China any more trustworthy? A large portion of the marvellous legends accepted by Japanese annalists are of Chinese origin.

Japanese authors maintain that lacquer work is a native industry, developed and perfected by them, and although they admit their indebtedness to China for carved lacquer and some other varieties, they claim to have instructed the Chinese in the making of gold picture lacquer. For while, in that branch of the art, the Chinese have never exhibited any remarkable skill, the Japanese have from the

outset improved on the style of that which they derived from China. And although the quality of the Chinese red lacquer, and the manual dexterity shown in its carving, can hardly be surpassed, the Japanese pieces are in most cases easily distinguished from the Chinese work by the absence of the formal and inartistic style of treatment, which characterises the latter.

Unfortunately, the information available in connection with the history of lacquer work in any European language is very meagre.

The section on lacquer in "Le Japon a l'Exposition de 1878, a Japanese official report, although often quoted, is very untrustworthy and incorrect. It is there stated that, in a *nezv* historical work, about B.C. 180, mention is made of lacquered furniture used in the palace. This would be highly important and very interesting if we could feel at all certain that any historical work, old or new, existed at that period, or even if we knew the tide of the book referred to.

We are next told that, at the end of the year 380, the Sadaijin Shihei, in a work called *Engiskiki*, speaks of gold lacquer and of red lacquer.

But, in another section of the same volume, we find that the office and title of Sadaijin were not created until about 260 years later, in the reign of the Emperor Kotoku (645-654). We also find that the *Engishiki* a work in fifty volumes, was written by Fujiwara Tadahira between 898 and 930, instead of by Shihei in 380.

The author adds that, about the year 410, "eighty years later" Minamoto no Juin speaks of gold lacquer and *nashiji* lacquer in a work called *Utsubo Monogatari*, and he quotes the *Genji Monogatari*, but makes the authoress, Murasaki Shikibu, live about 500 years before her real date, so that little use can be made of this work despite its official character.

A short work by a member of the Igarashi family, the celebrated lacquerers to the Shoguns, was translated for the Philadelphia Exhibition, but it contains little that throws any light on the subject beyond a description of the processes in lacquering.

The most copious source of information is still Mr. John J. Ouin's paper in the "Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan," vol. 9.\* The statement that during the reign of the Emperor

Koan (b.c. 392-291), Mitsune no Sukune was made director of the lacquer department may be reasonably disputed, more especially as we find elsewhere that Prince O-usu (Yamatodake), between 71 and 150, discovered the *Rhus vernicifera* growing wild, ordered lacquered goods to be made, and created Tokohiwa no Sukune, nuri-be, or director of lacquer work. Quin, however, states that the Emperor Kotoku {645-654) altered the title of the director created by Koan to urushi-be no muraji, having the same signification.

Although these statements are very vague, and somewhat contradictory, it can hardly be doubted that art lacquer work in Japan dates from a very early period. In the temple of Todaiji, at Nara, there are two lacquer boxes for containing the sacred writings, undoubtedly of Japanese make, and attributed to the 3rd century of our era.

The earliest authenticated examples of Japanese lacquer are those preserved in the Shoso-in, belonging to Todaiji, at Nara, one being the Kesa-bako, or scarf box, of Shotoku Taishi, who died in 621 ; the other, the scabbard of a sword, which belonged to the Emperor Shomu (724-748), it being quite certain that these are of Japanese make.

There seems to be no example, no record even, of any art lacquer of that age in China, and this is a strong argument in favour of the art being of Japanese origin.

It is curious that Quin describes the Kesa-bako as being of gold lacquer, and the scabbard as having figures of birds, animals, flowers and plants, in angular gold dust on a black lacquer ground, while Rein says that both are of simple black lacquer. Now, both these men wrote in Japan itself, both held official positions, and both were making a special study of lacquer ; and yet their descriptions are utterly irreconcilable.

Red lacquer seems to have been known as early as the time of the Emperor Temmu (673-686), for it is recorded that a workman made a set of shelves of red lacquer for him. Under the Emperor Mommu (697-707) there were twenty official lacquerers, who were bound to sign all articles made by them, and Quin says that the government prohibited the making of lacquer except by those workmen. Probably that prohibition only extended to certain articles.

He also says, that in the reign of the Emperor Shomu (724-748), five different coloured lacquers were used, as well as inlaying with mother-of-pearl. Gold, silver, copper and leather were also lacquered, and powdered gold mixed with lacquer was applied ; this, he adds, was the origin of makiye, or picture lacquer.

In the Genji Monogatari, written about 980, the authoress, Murasaki Shikibu, speaks of a " new kind of lacquer incrustated with mother-of-pearl," but we have seen that it is stated to have been so employed 240 years earlier, in the reign of the Emperor Shōmu. It was apparently in the reign of the Emperor Kwazan, about 985, that the makiye, or picture lacquer, with landscapes, figures and animals in gold, was produced, and it was then that the okiguchi, or bordering, of silver, tin, or lead, was added to the articles made for him.

Gold lacquer was largely employed at that period, even sword scabbards being decorated with it. During the reign of the Emperor Konoye (1142-1156), inlaying of coloured glass, as well as of mother-of-pearl, seems to have been used, and the nashiji, or aventurine lacquer, was very rich in gold, a specimen quoted in the Kogei Shiryo having from 28 to 69 penny weights of gold to the square foot.

During the reign of the Emperor Takakura (1169-1180), gold lacquering was profusely used, excellent work being produced during the latter part of the 12th century. In the temple of Itsukushima there is a box of black lacquer with cranes and pine branches in gold, of very fine workmanship and style; it held the dress of the child Emperor Antoku, who was drowned at the battle of Dan-no-ura in 1185.

In the temple of Hachiman, Kamakura, also, there are several pieces of lacquer dating from the end of the 12th to the beginning of the 14th centuries, remarkable for their good taste and quality, among them, a stizuri-bako, or writing box, of nashiji, with chrysanthemums by a fence, in gold ; this subject, with or without birds and butterflies, seems to have been a favourite decoration of that period.

When the Bakufu, or government by the Shoguns, was established, after 1185, they made Kamakura their capital, and encouraged lacquerers to settle there, Kioto, the residence of the Emperor, having hitherto been the headquarters of the art. But the lacquer of Kamakura never reached the same pitch of

excellence as that of Kyoto. During the stormy period which marked the rule of the Hojo family, between 1199 and 1333, the lacquer industry seems to have languished, but the art received a fresh impulse when the Ashikaga Shoguns came into power in 1335. It was about the middle of the 14th century that the taka-makiye, or raised gold lacquer, seems to have been introduced, although Kurokawa Mayori looks upon its origin as being rather the thick powdering with gold, used some hundreds of years earlier.

Under the eighth Ashikaga Shogun, Yoshimasa (1449-1471), landscapes, figures, flowers, in taka-makiye, as well as in hira-makiye, or flat gold lacquer, were largely introduced. Yoshimasa also ordered lacquerers, among whom Koami Michinaga, Michikiyo and Igarashi distinguished themselves, to make letterboxes specially for him of nashiji-hita-makiye, that is, with aventurine ground carried over the whole surface.

It was this second artist who made the objects by order of the Shogun for the Emperor Go-tsuchimikado on his accession. It was in that Emperor's reign (1465-1500) that Monnyu, a lacquerer, made tsuishu and tsuikoku, carved red and carved black lacquers, after Chinese examples, and in the preceding reign (Gohanazono, 1428-1464) that the Japanese lacquerers taught the Chinese the art of making gold picture lacquer.

From this period to the time of the Tokugawa Shoguns in 1603, lacquer working seems to have declined, for they were troublous years, but the long peace which followed the accession of Iyeyasu to power favoured the revival of the arts.

Among the celebrated works of the 17th century is the memorial shrine of the Shogun Hidetada, at the temple Zojoji, in the Shiba public gardens, and magnificent pieces of furniture made for the Shogun Iyemitsu (1623-1649) by Koami Nagashige, which are represented in the 8th number of the Kokkwa, a Japanese Art Journal published at Tokio.

But it was at the end of the 17th and at the beginning of the 18th century that lacquer working is considered to have reached its greatest perfection. The lacquer ware of that period is known as Joken-in Jidai, Joken-in being the posthumous name of the Shogun Tokugawa Tsunayoshi (1681-1708).

The earliest name of a lacquerer that we find recorded is that of Kiyohara Norisuye, about 1169, and about 1429 the Igarashi and Koami families appear as Court lacquerers, retaining that position for a very considerable period. But their names and works are known to few Europeans, the first names familiar to us being those of Kajikawa Hikobei, the master of Kajikawa Kiujiro, about 1637, and of Hon-ami Koyetsu (1558-1637).

The general use of inros as a part of the costume, opened a new field to lacquerers, and it is on those beautiful specimens of their art that signatures are most frequent. Koyetsu seldom signed inros, and specimens of his work are rare in Europe. His pupil, Tsuchida Soyetsu, is, however, better and more favourably known to us, his inros being frequently signed. The black lacquer of Soyetsu has in many cases acquired a deep, rich brown tone by age, the black having probably been originally due to acetate of iron, while that of Koma and Kajikawa preserves its intense velvety colour unchanged.

There is a long and brilliant list of these inro makers, many of whom also made larger pieces of lacquer, which were, however, more rarely signed. There was no falling off in the quality of the work until well into the 19th century, more especially as regards small pieces.

These were equal to the best work of the best period, for the artists profited by the advance in pictorial art, emancipating themselves to a great extent from the more objectionable features of the ancient Chinese school, while retaining its best qualities. The following are some of the more familiar names of lacquerers, extracted from the Kogei Shiryo, the Shoken Kisho, omitting those less known. The first, and best known name, is that of Kajikawa Kiujiro, about 1680, the founder of the Kajikawa family of lacquerers, which stretched into the 19th century.

He was a pupil of Kajikawa Hikobei, and was noted for the high finish of his work, and for his gyobu and nashiji lacquers, the rich effect of which in the linings of his inros are familiar to all collectors. But although we find the signatures of several Kajikawas, Hidetaka, Hisataka, Hogetsu, Takafusa, Tsunesada, upon inros, none of these names is to be found in the lists quoted above.

The next prominent name is that of Koma

Kiuhaku. He is regarded as the founder of the Koma family of lacquerers, although Koma Kiui, who died in 1633, was lacquerer to the Court. Koma Kiuhaku, who died in 1715, is, as are also his successors, chiefly known to us by his inros, perfect specimens of lacquer, and in a great variety of styles. The Koma family frequently used gold, red, or plain black for the linings of their inros instead of nashiji, a fashion adopted by many of their followers.

Koma Kiuzo, afterwards called Kiuhaku, died in 1715, and his son, Koma Kiuzo the second, who also took the name of Kiuhaku, died in 1733. A third Kiuzo, also taking the name of Kiuhaku, died in 1794, all three being Court lacquerers, as were others of the Koma family. Koma Kioriu, according to one account, was the adopted son of Koma Kiuhaku, but Zeshin, in his genealogy of the Komas, says that he was a pupil of Koma Kiuzo, the fifth Koma, who took afterwards the name Kiuhaku, and this is doubtless the correct statement. His original name was Kimura Shichiyemon, and his master, Kiuhaku, allowed him to assume the name of Koma.

Koma Kwansai, whose works are well known and highly esteemed, was a pupil of Kioriu, and like him was not a Koma by birth, his original name being Sakanouchi Jubei. Koma Kioriu allowed him to take the name of Koma, and he it was who revived the renown and the great traditions of the Koma family, which had fallen somewhat into abeyance. Besides being an eminent lacquerer, he was a writer of comic poems, and died in 1835.

The eldest son of Koma Kwansai, who bore the same name as his father, and who died in 1792, was also called originally Sakanouchi Jubei. The second son, Koma Bunsai, was a very skilful lacquerer and inro maker.

His black lacquer, both carved and plain, was very fine, and he made a clever imitation of shippo (cloisonne enamel) on black lacquer. Besides Koma Kwansai, there were two other pupils of Koma Kioriu, Omura Gyokuzan, who died about 1789, and Nomura Kyuho, an inro maker, who succeeded Nomura Kyukei, at Yedo, about the same year; the brother of Kyukei was Nomura Chohei.

Besides those mentioned above, there are other members of the Koma family whose signatures we find on inros, but not in Zeshin's genealogy. Among them are Yasumasa and Yasutada,\* both men of the 19th century, the

latter especially having executed very remarkable work in togidashi.

Ogata Korin, who died in 1716, holds a very prominent position among the lacquerers of the 17th-18th centuries, as much, perhaps, on account of the originality and eccentricity of his style, as for the intrinsic merit of his work.

Carrying, sometimes, his impressionism so near the verge of caricature that it is difficult to guess what object he really intends to represent, no one would suppose that he was in reality an admirable artist, had they not seen his drawings.

His gold lacquer is deservedly famous for the beauty of its tone, the gold powder being mixed with lacquer and painted on. But we frequently find in his gold grounds minutespecks of metallic gold, and although this has been cited as a mode of distinguishing his work, that is an error, for we find exactly the same character in some of the gold grounds of the Komas, of Nagata Yuji, his professed imitator, about the middle of the 18th century, and of other followers of Korin's style.

His mode of inlaying thick pieces of mother-of-pearl, lead, or pewter, projecting considerably above the surface of the lacquer, is very characteristic of his style. He also frequently cut the pieces of mother-of-pearl into the shape of the object represented, instead of forming it out of small pieces placed vertically side by side, as was the practice in the 17th and 18th centuries.

Ritsuo, or Ogawa Haritsu (1663-1747), was not only a lacquerer, but a carver, painter and potter, studying the two latter also Tray and plaque arts under Korin and his brother Kenzan, and introducing them all on wall. at times into his work with great skill and effect. His productions are very characteristic of his extraordinary life, full of eccentricities and of disregard for all customary ideas and habits. His pieces are very commonly signed Kwan, one of his names, on a small plaque of pottery, and are held in high estimation.

Having no son, he was succeeded by his pupil Hanzan, a very skilful inro maker, whose work is often incrustated with porcelain and mother-of-pearl shells and fishes. We generally find his inros with black linings, the risers decorated with chinkin-bori (engraving filled in with gold). He was called Ume-no-ki Hanzan (Hanzan of the plum tree,) from a plum tree in his garden

at Asakusa, Yedo. Kyozan was a pupil of Hanzan, following to a great extent the style of Ritsuo ; his proper name was Sakai Chubei.

Shiomi Kohei Masanari (sometimes read Masazane), about 1687, is well-known for his inros in togidashi. The second Shiomi was the son of a Harumasa and was called Kohei Masanari according to the Shaken Kisho, but in the Makiye Daizen and elsewhere he is called Shiomi Kohei Tomoharu. The works of both the Shiomi are very similar in character, and apparently have the same signatures.

Yamamoto Shunsho appears to be the first of an eminent and well-known family of lacquerers ; he was born in 1609 and died in 1682, being followed by Yamamoto Tsuneteru (or Josho), who flourished about 1688-1703. Kashiwagi Tomosuke Harutsugu, formerly Shunsho Hachizayemon (702-1770), was also a member of the family, but the most famous was Shunsho Jirobei, born in 1734. Shunsho Matashiro, who died in 1831, aged 58, worked in the same style as Jirobei, and both of them made inros, but we rarely find the signatures of the Shunshos on inros, so that it is difficult to decide which members of the family made them.

Their togidashi work is especially fine. Yamada Joka was an eminent inro maker of the latter half of the 18th century, and Kwanshosai Toyo, another and still more eminent one. He sometimes signed Kwanshosai, at others Toyo or Toyosai, and occasionally Kwanshosai Toyo ; he was also called Genroku, and worked about 1763. Hara Yoyu.sai, another very skilful inro maker and lacquerer, worked at the beginning of the present century, and one of the most familiar names among the lacquerers of that period is Shokwa.sai.

He belongs to the Kajikawa school of lacquerers, and, like his contemporary Kajikawas, worked frequently in conjunction with Shibayama. Although the incrustation of lacquer was no new thing, a great impulse was given to it by the appearance of Shibayama (Dosho). In inros with figure subjects in takatuakiye, it became the fashion to introduce faces, feet and hands of carved ivory or metal, and these small heads by Shibayama are often admirable in expression and execution.

Clever incrustations in metal of figure subjects belong to the same period, and have been continued through the century. But incrustation

with various substances has been one of the characteristic features of late 19th century lacquer work. It is impossible to deny the surprising minuteness of detail, and the ingenuity exhibited by the practitioners of this art, or, indeed, the beauty and rich effect of some of their work.

But it has been so generally recognised as belonging rather to an exhibition of great mechanical skill than to art, that the pieces are rarely, if ever, signed, and it has become, to a certain extent, a manufacture. In most of these works the lacquerer holds a very secondary position.

Komin is another of the earlier 19th century lacquerers, and his pupil, Ogawa Shomin, was famous for his imitation of the work of the old masters ; but perhaps the most remarkable lacquerer of the present century was Shibata Zeshin, who died in 1891.

Highly accomplished in every branch of his art, he adapted the style of every eminent master to his own ideas, and produced work worthy to be placed beside that of the most famous men. He was a pupil of Koma Kwansai, and one of his pupils, Ikeda Taishin, is still living.

As the 19th century advanced, fine lacquer work was produced more and more rarely, the art reaching perhaps its lowest level about the time of the opening of the ports and the appearance of lacquer work at the European exhibitions.

A demand for Japanese lacquer was suddenly created, and a vast amount was made to supply the demand. As has been already observed, an essential ingredient in the making of good lacquer is time, an element necessarily overlooked in this system of manufacture for commercial purposes.

The evil effect soon became manifest, for as the knowledge of fine lacquer spread in the West, and examples of the old work found their way to the hands of collectors, this inferior modern ware was discredited, and the idea became, and still is, prevalent, that good modern lacquer was an impossible thing.

Men like Zeshin demonstrated the error of that opinion, and efforts were, and are made, to revive the production of good lacquer, although, as a rule, it still leaves much to be desired.

The inferiority of much of the 19th century lacquer is most easily recognised by its relative softness and by its gold grounds. In the old work these have the appearance of a surface of metal, uniform in tone and texture, while the modern work will be found most frequently with a clouded or mottled surface. This arises sometimes from employing gold powder of an inferior quality, but very often is the result of a hasty and imperfect preparation of the underlying basis.

This preparatory ground is referred to hereafter, and is of the greatest importance to the success of the work. It is usually done by a special class of workmen, but in small pieces, inros, perfume boxes, the artist frequently executed the work himself, or it was done in his own workshop or under his eyes, and therefore never unduly hastened. It is very useful to compare the old and new gold lacquer work, age, however, improving the tone of the former, the effect of the old gold picture lacquer being remarkably rich and satisfying.

In the eyes of the Japanese aristocracy and amateurs, fine black lacquer was always held in very high esteem, either quite plain, or sparingly decorated with gold. Certain styles of black lacquer are, in fact, popularly known in Europe as daimyo lacquer, and few persons are insensible to the charm of handling a fine piece of black lacquer, while, to the eye, the rich velvety tone is equally attractive.

The use of colour in picture lacquer, of togidashi work particularly, was brought to the highest perfection in the 18th and 19th centuries, and we find, in the work of the Shunshos, the Komas, and others of those schools, a thin film of exceedingly fine gold or other metallic powder dusted over the finished painting so skilfully that, seen by oblique light, the whole surface appears to be of metal, almost or quite devoid of colour, while, if looked at by reflected light, or with the object between the eye and the source of light, the colours come out with great brilliancy.

Among these colours is a red, originating, it is said, with the Komas, of peculiar richness, due, as is reported, to the admixture of a preparation of gold with the vermilion. We find a similar process used in connection with the taka-makiye work, or raised lacquer, where a flower or bird, apparently of gold, proves to be coloured when examined in another light.

The adoption of designs by the modern realistic painters gave a great impulse to the togidashi style of lacquering, especially to that into which colour enters largely, although we sometimes find, in Shunsho's work for example, togidashi landscape executed in gold and brown only, a style which has also been followed with excellent effect by some of the Koma school.

Another clever variation of lacquer work, chiefly employed on inros, is that of making an Indian ink drawing, or a perfect imitation of it, on a gold ground. Toyo and others have produced very striking examples of this work. An equally clever effect, due, it is said, to the employment of very finely powdered charcoal, is and produced by leaving a design unpolished, visible on the highly polished black ground.

To show this, the subject selected is most frequently the Dream of Rosei, where the dream is represented most effectively, not on a polished black background. The peculiarity of this work is that it is clearly not a dull substance applied to a polished surface, but more like a depolishing, a process which, from the minuteness of the details, appears to be impossible.

There is another, and very unsatisfactory, style of lacquering, an outcome of the Tsugaru lacquer, in which lacquer is inlaid on lacquer of various colours. It is done by graving out the pattern on the coloured ground, filling in the cavity with lacquer of the desired colour, and then rubbing it down until the pattern comes out sharp and clear.

Lacquer differs essentially from our European varnishes, which are composed of gum resins dissolved in a medium, evaporating easily, and leaving a solid transparent film. It is the sap of the *Rhus vernicifera*, a species of sumach, and incisions are made in the stems of the trees at certain periods of the year, from which the sap exudes.

The tirushi "lacquer," so gathered, is called ki-urushi, while another kind, called seshime urushi or yeda urushi, "branch lacquer," is obtained from detached branches by a different process. These two lacquers vary greatly in character, the seshime requiring about twenty days to dry and harden, but being very hard when once dry, while the ki-urushi dries in twenty or thirty hours.

Seshime is consequently rarely used in the present day, except mixed with other lacquers. There is also a considerable difference in the lacquers derived from the various provinces, that of Yoshino, for instance, being very transparent and drying quickly.

Crude lacquer is a greyish viscous liquid of a creamy consistence, and is strained through linen in order to separate foreign matter with which it has become mixed in collecting, and it is then exposed in shallow wooden vessels, and frequently stirred to promote the evaporation of a portion of the water it contains.

The vessels are inclined, so as to allow a broad thin stream to run down, exposing a larger surface to the air, and during this process the lacquer becomes of a dark brown. One remarkable property of the urushi is that, if exposed to the sun for a few days, it becomes black, although translucent in thin layers, and if used will not dry, even if kept for a month in the drying cupboard.

But if water be mixed with it, it resumes its creamy colour, although somewhat darker, and if the operation of stirring and evaporating be then applied, it again becomes black and behaves like the ordinary lacquer.

Yoshino lacquer, according to Korschfeldt, is composed of-

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| Urushic acid               | 85.15 |
| Gum, similar to gum Arabic | 3.15  |
| A nitrogenous substance    | 2.28  |
| Water                      | 42.00 |

One singular result of its chemical composition is that, except with difficulty, it will only dry and harden in a damp atmosphere, and within a certain range of temperature, i.e., between 80° and 68° Fahr., while near the freezing point it will not harden at all. All lacquer work is therefore placed to dry in wooden cupboards, kept damp by wetting the shelves with water.

There are, however, additions made to the lacquer which hasten the drying and extend the range of working temperature, but the quality of the lacquering suffers thereby, and good lacquer work cannot be so produced.

In fact, all the hard and fine old work, all really high class and durable lacquer, is the result of time as well as of skill and of patient labour; none of the processes can be hastened without detriment, and hence the great

difference between old and modern lacquer. It is not so much that the modern workman is less skilful than his predecessors, in fact, he has materials and appliances at command enabling him to produce works even more striking than those of the old masters; but the exigences of commerce do not allow him to give the requisite time to it, the work would be too costly.

He therefore resorts to various modes of rendering the lacquer more easy to work, by the addition of camphor or perilla oil (from *Perilla ocymoides*), the consequence being that the beauty of the finished work soon diminishes. Experts readily recognise modern lacquer by the smell, and the manufacturers practice various methods of getting rid of it.

In first class lacquer work the lacquer is applied by means of cotton, in the thinnest possible films in most cases, and is partlywiped off with soft paper.

As a general rule, the lacquer is not applied as a varnish to produce a glossy surface, the high polish being the result of friction with the hand, dressed with a powder of calcined deer's horn and a small quantity of oil.

The process of lacquering has been often described at length, and notably by Quin and Rein ; but all these descriptions are to some extent misleading as regards the early stages, and confusing as regards the more delicate processes, that of togidashi for instance.

Rein does not even attempt to describe it, and almost all that we can understand from other descriptions is, that the gradations of tone are produced by the greater or less thickness of lacquer over the gold or colour, and that the work has to be rubbed down until the proper effect of brightness of gold or colour is reached. We can easily understand that where the films are so excessively thin, the smallest excess of rubbing destroys the work or produces an uneven tint.

It is commonly known in Europe as "rubbed lacquer," a translation of togidashi-makiye, and its effect is that of fine pastel work.

In the production of a piece of plain black lacquer of the first class, or of a piece destined to be ornamented, Quin describes thirty-three separate processes, twelve of which are applications of thin coats of lacquer, requiring the object to be placed in the cupboard to dry

and harden nineteen times, for periods varying from twelve hours to three days.

At most of the stages of preparation the surface has to be gone over with charcoal or whetstone, solid or in powder, and finished as truly and perfectly as if it were the final operation. If the piece were worked at continuously it would require twenty-two days as a minimum for completion.

When the article has to be decorated in gold or colour the amount of time expended on such decoration varies of course ad infinitum. And it is well to bear in mind that even in the hira-makiye, or flat gold picture lacquer, the design is not painted on in gold but in lacquer, and on the lines so made gold powder of the requisite fineness is dusted from a small tube, the end of which is covered with a woven material through which the powder can pass.

In the case of a flat gold ground, the process is usually the same : it is not covered with gold leaf, but is produced by dusting gold powder on to wet lacquer, a process repeated several times until the requisite thickness is obtained. For particular tones or effects, we sometimes find the ground painted on with gold mixed with lacquer, and this is also done in the case of coloured grounds, but in others the colour is dusted on, like the gold.

We frequently find small quadrangular pieces of gold foil of various shapes and dimensions applied to the gold surfaces, especially where rocks or clouds are represented. This is called by Quin and Rein, Gyobu jtaskiji, and described as the invention of Gyobu Taro, a lacquerer of the beginning of the 18th century.\*

These pieces of foil are laid on one by one with the greatest regularity, sometimes covering considerable surfaces. The work is called by some, kirikane work, the pieces of gold being called kirikane, or kirame, or ishime, stone-work. Other kinds have the pieces of gold of irregular outline, and not placed in regular order, all these varieties having their special names.

The nashiji, or aventurine grounds, have powdered gold of coarser texture dusted on to them, which, when dry, is covered with lacquer, the process being repeated according to the quality of the work.

For common work, silver, or tin powder is used instead of gold, the final coat of lacquer being

coloured with gamboge, or dragon's blood, to produce the effect of gold dust.

Nashiji was frequently employed, either quite plain or decorated, especially for paper boxes, in old lacquer work, and was very hard, rich and durable. It is generally used for the linings and bottoms of boxes, inros.

The descriptions of the preliminary processes are misleading, because they leave the impression on anyone who has not investigated the matter, that they are alike for all objects.

But they vary greatly, according to the methods and ideas of the individual workman, and the character or quality of the object. Large pieces will have their wooden bases covered with woven material, followed by coats of jinoko or tonoko, finely powdered burnt clay or pottery, mixed with lacquer. Smaller pieces will merely have a covering of paper, and modifications of the jinoko and tonoko, the object being to prevent any sap of the wood reaching the lacquer.

Inros and sword scabbards will have special preparations, and so on. The woods employed for lacquer ware are somewhat numerous, but for the finer work, and for small pieces, Hinoki (*Chamcecyparis obtusa*) and Kiri (*Panlownia imperialis*) are chiefly used. Sword scabbards are always made of Ho-no-ki (*Magnolia hypoleuca*) and scabbard lacquering was a special branch of the art.

Lacquering on metal is a totally different process, and has been much employed in modern times on vases and other objects in iron, to which it gives a rich brown surface. The metal being smoothed and polished, it receives a coating of lacquer, and is then heated over a charcoal fire until it gives off no smoke ; but the metal must not be made red hot, otherwise it burns the lacquer and reduces it to an ash. T

he surface is smoothed with charcoal, and the operation repeated three or four times until the requisite thickness is attained.

Any ornamentation or colouring of the surface is performed in the same way as on wood, except that the lacquer is roasted instead of being dried in a damp cupboard. This lacquering on metal is very adherent, hard and durable.

Besides the many varieties used by the sword-



sheath lacquerer, there are about a hundred employed for various purposes, or made in different districts, some differing but slightly from others. It will be sufficient to name a few of the principal ones only, those in fact of which the distinctive characters are the most easily recognised.

Aogai-nuri refers to lacquered ware, to the crude lacquer). This is of various kinds ; in one, much used for scabbards, coarsely powdered haliotis shell is sifted on, lacquered over and rubbed down, as in making nashiji.

Another style has flakes of shell cut to the form of the object represented and fastened to the lacquer when wet. It is then covered over with lacquer, and rubbed down until the design, the surface being usually engraved, reappears.

But the most important description is made by cutting out segmentary forms in the shell with a sharp knife or chisel, and attaching them to lacquer. It is in reality a shell mosaic, diapers of the most elaborate kind being produced with astonishing accuracy, as well as flowers, landscapes and animals.

It is a work involving, as a rule, much patience and skill in lieu of art, but one celebrated inro maker, Chobei, was known, from his skilful employment of this style, as Aogai Chobei.

Chinkin-bori (bori, engraving or carving). In this, the design engraved on the plain surface of the lacquer, and the lines are accentuated with gold. In competent hands the effect is excellent, like a fine etching printed in gold.

It is of Chinese origin and was introduced at an early period, the work being frequently executed, it is said, with a rat's tooth to preserve an equality in the strength of the lines, a steel point blunting too rapidly. Towards the end of the 18th century Ninomiya Totei was a celebrated worker in this style, and the risers of the inros by Hanzan and others are frequently decorated in chinkin-bori.

Guri lacquer. This is also of Chinese origin, and was introduced into Japan, it is said, by Yosei about 1660, together with tsuishu and tsuikoku, carved red and black lacquers, whence he was called Tsuishu Yosei. It differs, however, from those lacquers by being formed of layers of lacquer of different colours superposed.

A sort of scroll pattern is usually cut upon it in

V-shaped grooves, the sides of the cut showing lines of coloured lacquer. Each layer is, however, composed of many very thin layers of lacquer, and has to be accurately smoothed and finished before the next colour is commenced, so as to keep the lines of colour horizontal and parallel to each other.

As this required much time, labour and skill, guri lacquer was costly and was rarely made of late years.

Sometimes we find this lacquer in very varied colours, yellow, green, red and landscapes and figure subjects are carved upon it by cutting away the layers until the colour required is reached, yellow for the flesh, green for foliage,

One variety of this variegated carved lacquer is the Kokwa ryokuyo or red flower, green leaf lacquer. In this, the layers of coloured lacquer are very thin, and the relief, therefore, so slight that the red flowers and green leaves look almost as if modelled on with a brush instead of being carved.

Kamakura-bori, made at Kamakura, consists of wood carving, usually flowers, covered with a ground of black lacquer, over which was a layer of red lacquer, and the work was not of very good quality.

Echizen-bori, very similar, has not been made at Echizen, according to Quin, since 1573. Odawara-bori is of the same character, but very inferior.

Miyako lacquer (the old name of Kioto) is the name usually given to a lacquer having a terra cotta coloured ground on which are subjects in black lacquer in relief.

Mokume, or wood grain. This name is more particularly applied to a somewhat conventional rendering of the broad graining of soft wood, in many gradations of gold of various colours, and of brown.

It is very difficult of execution, and is therefore costly. It must not be confounded with the imitations of wood of various kinds, in which the Japanese lacquerers are so skilful, imitating even the orifices of the ducts, that it is often difficult, without cutting into the lacquer, to tell whether the natural wood is visible or not.

Owari lacquer. This is the name given to a lacquer, used chiefly for inros or small boxes,

in which flowers in solid gold or silver are applied on a gold ground, the leaves, being in raised lacquer. We sometimes find coral, haliotis shell, introduced.

Samegawa-nuri, or Sharkskin lacquer. The samegawa is the skin of a fish having white nodules of various sizes on its surface.

It is commonly rendered "sharkskin," but in reality the skin of a species of ray (Rein calls it a roach), the *Rhinobatus armatus*. It is commonly employed for covering the handles of swords and daggers, and the large grained skins are sometimes securely glued on to scabbards, the nodules partially rasped down and the whole covered with black lacquer.

When this is ground down, smoothed and polished, it has the appearance of a number of rounded discs of ivory imbedded in lacquer. This is "samegawa-nuri," but a much finer grained skin is treated in the same manner used for covering inros and small boxes. Sometimes the skin is previously stained, but this variety is not often met with.

This finer grained fish skin is also applied to scabbards, and lacquered in like manner.

Suri-hagashi-nuri, or rubbed-off lacquer. This is sometimes called tortoiseshell lacquer, and consists of a finished coat of black lacquer, on which a coat of red lacquer is applied. This is rubbed off in places with charcoal so as to expose the black lacquer, the edges being carefully graduated. It is then finished and polished in the usual manner.

Tsugaru-nuri. This is made in the Tsugaru district, and is a variety of the Guri lacquer, but is made with layers of various colours, black, red, yellow and green, and instead of the layers being horizontal, they are more or less undulating, and thinner, as a rule, than those of Guri lacquer.

When, therefore, the surface is ground down, or a slice removed, a marbled surface is produced, showing a greater or less number of the layers. It is far more difficult to make and more costly than the Guri, and is rarely met with, especially in pieces of any size, and still more rarely carved.

Tsuishu, and Tsuikoku, carved red, and carved black lacquers, have been already referred to. At the beginning of the 17th century a famous maker of them was thence known as Tsuishu

Heijuro.

The Chinese, who invented it, produce very fine examples of carved red lacquer, concerning which Rein makes an astonishing statement. He says that it is carved when hot, a popular idea of those who believe red lacquer to be a variety of sealing wax. He quite overlooks the impossibility of keeping a huge vase, like that in the South Kensington Museum, hot while it was being carved, more especially when the object is of wood.

But the most remarkable feature is, that he tells us he had lacquerers working under him for six months, and he never seems to have discovered that heating a body of hardened lacquer has no effect on it, a thing any one possessing an old sword scabbard can ascertain for himself. Wakasa-nuri.

This is made by coating the ground-work of the lacquer with a kind of paste, on which, while yet soft, the pattern is impressed. Leaves, or sprigs of conifer are often so used. When the paste has hardened they are removed, leaving hollows, with raised outlines.

The whole is covered with gold or silver foil (tin foil for common work) carefully pressed into all the depressions, and it then receives a number of coats of transparent coloured lacquer until the hollows are all filled. It is then rubbed down until the foil on the highest portions, the outlines, is reached, and the pattern is then seen in varying depths of colour, from that of the pure metal.

Zogan-nuri, or damascened lacquer, has the subject outlined or even detailed, in gold or silver wire, filled in with lacquer of different colours. In the old work this is applied to landscapes, but in modern work by a different process, using sheets of foil, more in the style of Wakasa lacquer, an excellent imitation of damascening in silver is produced. It is usually taken for an inlaying of silver wire. The real work is seldom met with.

Zokoku-nuri. This was invented by Tamakaji Zokoku at the end of the last century, in imitation of a variety of Chinese lacquer, and he was followed by his son, Zokoku, and his brother, Fujikawa Seiji. The groundwork is of bamboo or wood, upon which black or red lacquer is laid and carved, usually with minute patterns of flowers, filled in with coloured lacquer.

Lacquer is also applied to pottery and porcelain, but although there are specimens dating from the 17th century, the art seems to have fallen into abeyance, until revived in the present century by Hoki Toyosuke, whose lacquered pottery is known as Toyosuke raku-yaki. Idzumo pottery is decorated in a similar manner, but lacquer ware takes so many forms and is applied to so many purposes, that it is difficult to enumerate or to describe its varieties, or the modes in which urushi is utilised.

No one familiar with the higher class of lacquer work will be disposed to look upon the opinion of M. Gonse as exaggerated when he speaks of Japanese lacquered objects as among the most perfect that ever left the hands of man. Apart from their beauty, they have a special interest as recording the dominant ideas of decoration and of painting at various periods.

Many of the lacquerers, as we have seen, were themselves painters; but often other draughtsmen furnished designs for the more celebrated lacquerers, and it is interesting to note how these pictures have been translated into gold or coloured lacquer.

We frequently find, on inros especially, the name of the painter recorded as well as that of the lacquerer, and in some instances, more especially in the 19th century, the painter only is mentioned, leaving it doubtful whether he actually executed the work in lacquer. Remembering, however, that priests and nobles were amateur lacquerers, and that some artists are more widely known as lacquerers than as painters, it is not unreasonable to suppose that in some of the cases alluded to the painter executed the work himself.

The study of lacquer work is as fascinating and as varied, as that of Japanese ceramics. But while, with respect to the latter, we have at our disposal and for our guidance a vast amount of information, Japanese and European, besides many noted collections accessible to the student, the reverse is the case with regard to lacquer.

Unfortunately, too, while the perfected processes of illustration at the present day do so much to render descriptions of pottery and porcelain practically useful, lacquer in any form has defied mechanical methods of reproduction of every kind, and nothing is to be learned except by an examination of the

objects themselves.

Our museums and public collections offer us no sufficient means of study, and hence the desirability of gathering together from time to time examples from private sources. Such Exhibitions not only add to the knowledge of collectors, but enlighten the general public as to the real character and merit of this beautiful branch of Japanese art.

E. GILBERTSON.

- The substance of this paper was issued in 1882 as an Official Report, entitled " Report by H.M.'s Acting Consul at Hakodate, on the Lacquer Industry of Japan." This document is dated 13th January, 1882. It was accompanied by a long series of specimens illustrating the materials, the apparatus, and the processes employed by Japanese Lacquerers. There are also in Mr. Quin's collection a few examples of old lacquer ranging in age from 50 to 130 years, as well as a number of specimens exhibiting the sequence of the numerous stages through which a single piece of the ware has to pass before it can be regarded as completely finished. For the last eleven years the entire collection has been exhibited in Museum No. I. in the Royal Gardens at Kew