

FOUR GERMAN BOOKS ON JAPANESE PRINTS

Reviewed by *ARTHUR DAVISON FICKE.*

Die Primitiven des Japanholzschnitts, by Julius Kurth. (1922, Verlag von Wolfgang Jess, Dresden.)

Der frühere Japanische Holzschnitt, by Carl Einstein (Verlag Ernst Wasmuth A.-G., Berlin.)

Katsukawa Shunsho, by Friedrich Succo. (1922, C. F. Schulz & Co., Plauen im Vogtland.)

Die Kunst der Japanischen Holzschnittmeister, by Ludwig Bachhofer. (1922, Kurt Wolff Verlag, München.)

All of the four books under consideration are handicapped by the assumption on the part of their authors that the field of Japanese prints can be adequately illustrated by reference to German collections alone. This assumption leads to nonsense. For example, I translate from Dr. Kurth (freely, but not too freely), that "he'd like to see anybody bring together such a group of prints of the Torii School as these seventeen examples!" ("*Es soll einmal wieder eine ähnliche Galerie von Torii-Drucken zusammengestellt werden, wie unsere 17 Nummern!*") Such an announcement is impressive; it might even be convincing; but it can hardly remain so in the face of Dr. Kurth's temerity in going on and reproducing his seventeen examples. For the reproductions give the reader an opportunity to judge for himself; and unfortunately for Dr. Kurth's statement, it at once becomes obvious to the initiated that there is no collection so poor among the twelve or fifteen great French, American and Japanese collections, that it cannot, all by itself, make Dr. Kurth's "Galerie" of seventeen selected German examples look like the proverbial thirty cents. Similarly, in each of these books, the reader is continually perplexed by encountering a curious unwillingness to see beauty, even century-old Japanese beauty, when it happens to be located outside of Germany.

Japanese prints have been known to Europe and America for only a little more than half a century; and it is a matter of common knowledge that, speaking in general, Germany has been the last country in the western world to which the finest art-treasures would have been likely to gravitate during that period. No such discrimination between the best and the third-best has been exercised in German collections as has been characteristic of the great French, American, and Japanese collections; German interest in prints as "documents" has been more active than has a pure aesthetic interest. Industrious scholars, not artists or humanists, have set the fashion there. Dealers will tell you that the place to dump rubbish has been the Yokohama tourist market, or the German market. The result, if one may judge from the four volumes before us, has been that the writers of such books as these have simply not had adequate materials available in their own country; and, unfortunately, their curiosity apparently has stopped at the national border. They have failed to follow the example of the brilliant and admirable pioneer in this field, their fellow-countryman, Von Seidlitz, who went chiefly to French collections for his material. In this they are making a costly mistake; for the truth is that most of the supreme prints have long since found home in either France or America.

But now as to these four books in detail.

Dr. Kurth's volume on the Primitives does not pretend to be more than a summary of a voluminous work on this subject which, he states, he has had in preparation for many years. It consists of a brief account of dates, school-relationships, and other somewhat dryly noted facts that are of limited interest. He re-