Japanese art interpreted by a Japanese.

As an interpretation of "The Spirit of Japanese Art," Yone Noguchi's little book in the excellent "Wisdom of the East Series" (Dutton) would be more convincing were the author's command of English adequate for the expression of his ideas with clearness and precision. Professor Noguchi is, however, a poet and a thinker; and if, to the Occidental mind, his verbal imagery is sometimes obscure, no great effort on the part of the reader is required to penetrate the meaning of even such sentences as the following: "As a certain critic remarked, the real beauty flies away like an angel whenever an intellect rushes in and begins to speak itself; the intellect, if it has anything to do, certainly likes to show itself up too much, with no consideration for the general harmony that would soon be wounded by it." This is the way he looks upon the criticism of Utamaro's works made in that artist's day by those who "saw the moral and the lesson but not the beauty and the picture." The ten short papers that make up the volume have for their themes the works of eight artists of the last three centuries, "Ukiyoye Art in Original," and "Western Art in Japan." Their chief claim to consideration lies in their presentation of the views of an educated Japanese of the present day who is impressed by the inherent worth of the classic art of the Far East, and yet is able to perceive much intrinsic merit in the work of such artists as Kyosai and Tsukioka Yoshitoshi. Such catholicity of taste savors somewhat of indiscriminate admiration. But Professor Noguchi does not write as a critic; indeed he exclaims, "Criticism? Why, that is the art for people imperfect in health, thin and tired." He aims instead to present the emotional subjectivity of which he asserts that to lose it "against the canvas, or, I will say here in Japan, the silk, is the first and last thing." With some of his dicta it is impossible to agree, as when he claims that the greatest praise we can give to any works of art is that "they never owed one thing to money or payment for their existence." A few misspellings of proper names, as "Hopper" instead of Happer, and "Fenellosa" for Fenollosa, mar the pages; and in saying that Katsukawa Shunsho "died in 1792 at the age of ninety-seven" the author overstates that artist's years by thirty-one. Against these slight blemishes he must be credited with having coined some delightfully felicitous phrases. Of Kwaigetsudo Dohan he says "he might be the cleverest" of the Kwaigetsudo group, but "his colour-harmony is marred by ostentatious imprudence." And in the opening sentences of the Introduction we have these significant words:

"In the Ashikaga age (1335-1573) the best Japanese artists, like Sesshu and his disciples, for instance, true revolutionists in art, not mere rebels, whose Japanese simplicity was strengthened and clarified by Chinese suggestion, were in the truest meaning of the word Buddhist priests, who sat before the inextinguishable lamp of faith, and sought their salvation by the road of silence; their studios were in the Buddhist temple, east of the forests and west of the hills, dark without and luminous within with the symbols of all beauty of nature and heaven. And their artistic work was a sort of prayer-making, to satisfy their own imagination, . . they drew pictures to create absolute beauty and grandeur, that made their own human world look almost trifling, and directly joined themselves with eternity."

It is not easy to see how this could be put more finely or more cogently.