

JAPANESE PAPER.

MOST persons are familiar with the peculiar character of Japanese paper, which is made from the inner bark of the mulberry tree. It is seldom bleached, but made as clean as possible, hence its peculiar color. It is made in small villages, where all the inhabitants are paper makers. The sons of paper makers follow the profession of their fathers, unless adopted into a family pursuing some other vocation. The paper mulberry tree, of which it is made, is propagated by cuttings from the roots, which are planted on the borders of rice fields, and they mature in about five years. In November the reeds are cut and sold to the paper makers, and the roots are left to send up new shoots.

The shoots are cut in pieces two feet long, piled up and allowed to ferment, which loosens the bark so that it can be stripped off, after which they are dried in the open air, or scraped at once. The scraping removes the brown epidermis, which is used for inferior wrapping paper. About 34 pounds of the bark are boiled for two hours in a strong lye of wood ashes. The material is then put in bags and left in a running stream until the alkali is completely removed. It is next beaten, two or three pounds at a time, on a wooden block, with heavy sticks for fifteen or twenty minutes. This pulp is mixed with a little rice paste, or a paste from a species of mallow. A thin pulp is obtained by stirring one-quarter pound of this mass into forty or fifty gallons of water.

The web or mat on which the pulp is collected is made of slender strips of bamboo, only the thirty-sixth part of an inch in diameter, several hundred of these are bound together with silk thread, the rods all run lengthwise of the sheet, and hence the mats can be rolled or folded up in one direction. For coarse paper reed mats

are employed. The process of manufacture is essentially the same as in making hand-made paper. A woman sits in front of the tank and stirs it vigorously, then dips a mat and frame into the vat, takes up some of the pulp and shakes it, so as to felt the fibres together. A single dip makes a very thin tissue paper, most paper is made by dipping twice and draining each time. After the second dipping the mat is placed on end by the side of the tank to drain, and the frame put on a second mat, which also receives its first dipping.

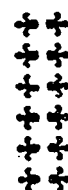
While the second sheet is draining for the first time the mat with the first sheet is laid face down on a pile of finished sheets, with a rice straw between them. While the second sheet is draining for a second time, the mat is taken off from the first sheet, so that only two mats are necessary. When 500 or 600 sheets, which form a day's work, are completed, they are pressed for a while with heavy weights, then taken up one at a time, by means of the rice straw, and placed on smooth boards to dry in the sun. When dry the sheets are stripped from the board by a sharp knife, with the blade at right angles to the handle, like a sickle. The finished paper weighs about one-half as much as the bark employed.

Copying paper is collected by the middlemen from the numerous small paper makers in the villages of the paper districts, a few reams from each house, and sold to the wholesale dealers, hence the considerable variations in the quality, which it is impossible to avoid in a paper produced by such a variety of hands. The uses to which the Japanese put paper are various in the extreme. Almost everything that is not subjected to any severe usage is manufactured from paper prepared by several chemical processes, many of which are exceedingly ingenious — Paper Mill

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