FROM A JAPANESE BOOK WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY HOKUSAI: Furuyu Goju-nin Isshu Izukawa Kyoka Guruna, a collection of humorous poems. The first edition of an exceedingly rare book dated Koiwa 2 (1802). The art of printing in color from wood-blocks reached a perfection in Japan during the 18th and 19th Centuries that challenges the admiration of the world. The amazing thing about these color-prints, as Edward F. Strange has pointed out, is "that the perfectly harmonious results obtained in the best period were the product of the united labors of three separate individuals", viz., the artist, the engraver, and the printer, "displaying a perfection of handicraftsmanship almost incomprehensible to the European". It is commonly supposed that Japan learned color-printing, like so many other arts, from China; but in the opinion of recent investigators this is not true. Certainly the Ukiyo-ye School, which includes most of the greatest wood-block artists, developed a technique all its own, and a delicacy of line and color, due in part to the quality of paper employed, that could never be mistaken for the product of any other nation or period. A paradoxical fact about Japanese color-printing from its inception almost to its decline is that this art received no recognition from the higher classes of society; it began and ended as an art of the people, and most of the great masters of the color-print struggled against privation and want.

Hokusai, not quite typical of his school, was the most versatile and prolific of all, and was the first Japanese artist to gain popularity abroad. He was born in 1760 and died in 1849. Hokusai’s output of illustrations was prodigious (quite apart from his work as a painter), and included the famous Mangwa, a series of fifteen albums containing many hundreds of his drawings, marvellous in their variety and scope. As an example of modern Japanese methods, a leaf has been added from a recent reproduction of a work on Hawks and Hawking, illustrated by Kyosai, the last prominent artist of the Ukiyo-ye School (and incidentally the gayest), who died in 1889. This is a machine-made product, and causes one to sigh for the glorious art it superseded.