THE oldest cartoon in Japan is a scroll of bird and animal caricatures painted by Kakuyu, the Priest of Toba, who lived during the latter part of the Fujiwara period, about eight hundred years ago. The humor, fluency, and subtlety flowing from the brush of this priest-cartoonist form a source of wonder to the foreigner, who is amazed at the accuracy and aptness with which these caricatures were drawn so long ago. All the animals depicted, which include rabbits, foxes, monkeys, cats, and frogs, are personified. Through them the artist satirizes the luxurious life of the peers of those days.

FLYING RICE BAGS

The Priest of Toba once painted a cartoon in which bags of rice are shown being carried through the air by the wind, while Buddhist priests and novices are very agitated at this unusual sight and are desperately trying to retrieve the bags. This cartoon caught the attention of a certain high personage in the Imperial Court. He summoned Kakuyu and asked him for an explanation of this interesting and curious picture. To this the cartoonist answered: “Well, my lord, you see, the bags of rice recently contributed to the temples are full of chaff and do not contain rice. This is why these bales are blown away by the wind. I really thought this was an interesting subject, and so I painted the scene.”

The Priest’s hint carried much weight, with the result that the authorities concerned issued strict orders to the people that no spurious rice was to be contained in the rice bags. The nobles particularly were sternly notified of this. All this proved most effective, and the rice contribution became satisfactory again. This little anecdote shows the Priest’s influence as a cartoonist.

The peers were supreme during the Fujiwara period and exerted an ex-
clusive patronage over the arts. Their taste in painting ran to the Buddhist art of the Tang dynasty in China. The result was that practically all artists in Japan imitated the solemn and tranquil style that dealt only with lofty subjects. The sudden appearance, therefore, of pictures concerned with people and events of everyday life and filled, moreover, with wit and humor, caused quite a stir.

The Priest of Toba, this painter of realism, thus became the founder of Japanese caricature. Japan takes a modest pride in the fact that cartoons of great value were produced in those early days.

**DEMONS AND DEBAUCHERY**

The Kamakura period (1192-1333) was characterized by the rising influence of the nobles and the waning of that of the peers. Naturally painting was affected by this tendency of national life. Strength and realism replaced effeminacy and idealism in the basic traits of all kinds of painting. Lively characterization and scenes from daily life, spiced with many a sociological and political hint, were featured in the pictures then produced. The then popular picture books, especially those of Mitsunaga Fujiwara, contained a number of outright cartoons. This artist attacked the debauchery and dissipation of his times through his representations of hell and demons. The cartoons of the Priest of Toba obviously had far-reaching effects on the painting of the Kamakura period.

During the following Muromachi and Momoyama periods, the Chinese Sung dynasty art exerted its influence on Japan and popularized the hanging scroll depicting serene landscapes. Picture-book art declined and only continued to flourish in stories for juveniles, just as in America today most popular cartoons are directed at juvenile readers.

After the passing of the period of the warring barons, there came the peaceful days of the Tokugawa period. At that time the printing process called wood-engraving was invented. The peaceful times allowed commoners to take a greater interest in art, which in turn brought about the blossoming of the fine art of wood-engraving. Of course, the style of painting was also influenced by the greatly widened circle of art lovers, and “genre” painting, known under the name of *Ukiyo-e*, became popular.

There were two main schools of *Ukiyo-e* painting, the *Otsue*, named after Otsu, a town on the highway between Yedo and Kyoto where travelers used to buy *Ukiyo-e* pictures as souvenirs, and the *Tobae*, named after the Priest of Toba.

**AUTHORITIES OBJECT**

The name of Itcho Hanabusa is one of the greatest in the annals of Japanese caricature. He lived during the Genroku Era of the Tokugawa period (1688-1704). Itcho sketched portraits of powerful men during his time and intended to publish a book entitled “A Hundred Men” supplemented with satirical comments of his own. Before publication, however, he was arrested by Shogunate officials and put in jail for a time. After his release he published a picture book called “A Hundred Women.” One of his pictures portraying the fifth Shogun Tsunayoshi Tokugawa and his concubine incurred the displeasure of the authorities, and Itcho was exiled to Oshima Island. Before going there, Itcho told his wife: “I may be forced to servitude on the island and employed in making dried fish stretched on pieces of bamboo.
As a sign that I am in good health I will insert pine needles into the fish gills. Should you find such fish, you may set your mind at ease." He remained on the island for twelve years. Nevertheless his fame continued to grow throughout that time.

**ACTORS REPLACE POLITICIANS**

Another interesting development of that period was the popularity of handsome portraits of beautiful women and of actors of the Kabuki stage, rivaling the present-day popularity of photographic portraits of famous movie stars. With the example of Itcho's fate before them, the painters of that period carefully avoided all political subjects, and devoted their attention to the uncontroversial field of the stage. Some very fine caricatures were produced by Sharaku Toshusai and Kuniyoshi. It is curious to note that the former was not really appreciated in Japan until Western admirers, hundreds of years later, drew attention to his merit.

This concentration on sketching Kabuki actors continued until the Tenmei Era (1781-1789), when the Tokugawa Shogunate carried out a policy of extreme financial retrenchment which disturbed the popular mind. The ensuing change in social conditions resulted in a tendency to criticize politics in doggerel verse, satirical poems, and anonymous cartoons reproduced by wood-engraving, a tendency which continued up to the days of the Meiji Restoration, when it was at its height.

**TWO EXTREMES**

During the latter part of the Shogunate Government an *Ukiyo-e* school humorously depicting social affairs became prevalent. Hokusai Katsushika was one of the most renowned painters of this school, and the "Hokusai Caricature Book" is now world-famous. He lived from 1760 to 1849. He embodied unique ideas in his work and outstripped tradition in his naturalistic manner of painting anything that came into his mind.

Caricature used to be known by the expression *Tobae* (Toba pictures) or *Giga* (fun pictures), but during the days of Hokusai the expression *Manga* (caricatures), used to this day, came into fashion. A story told about Hokusai is that on one occasion he spread a huge sheet of paper the size of 120 tatamis (straw mats), i.e. about 180 square feet, in a temple compound. On this he painted a picture of Hotei, a rich, fat-bellied, smiling old man. Immediately afterwards he painted two sparrows on a grain of rice. In this way he greatly impressed his audience by his versatility.

Keisai Kuwagata was another famous painter of that period. His "Artisans' Picture Book" is a humorous representation of the customs and manners of the artisans of his time. Keisai's tremendous popularity induced almost all painters to turn toward the field of cartoon and caricature.
ENTER THE WEST

After the visit of Commodore Perry's ships (1853), foreign culture was rapidly introduced into Japan. One foreign product to be imported was Western-style caricature. Charles Wagman, an Englishman, came to Japan in the late fifties as correspondent for The Illustrated London News. He married a Japanese, and stayed in the country until his death in 1891. His cartoons of Japanese life which he sent home to his paper caught the fancy of some Japanese, who published the first Japanese cartoon magazine called the Japan Punch, which existed for about eight years.

Following the Meiji Restoration (1868), Japan plunged into the tide of Western civilization and culture with a sweeping change in political and social structure. Diplomatic envoys were exchanged with Europe and America, a telegraph service was inaugurated between Tokyo and Kyoto, a railway constructed between Tokyo and Yokohama. Topknots were abolished, newspapers published, parks opened, and street-lighting by gas introduced. All this caused wonder and confusion among the people. Popular customs following Western styles mingled with lingering customs of the feudal period and produced an indescribably strange potpourri. This provided splendid material for cartoonists to work on. The Japan Punch was followed by the Marumaru Chindan and many similar cartoon periodicals. One of these was the Nisshin Senso Shorakukai (Sino-Japanese War Laughter-Provoking Society), founded by Kiyochika Kobayashi.

CARTOONS ENTER INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

At first political cartoons dealt only with domestic issues. But when the Russo-Japanese War broke out, Rakuten Kitazawa appeared on the scene with caustic cartoons concerning foreign political events. Rakuten was in charge of the Tokyo Puck, founded in 1895. His cartoons did much to create a bellicose spirit in Japan and to prepare the people for war. He cleverly made use of the expansionist ideas then prevalent in Japan, underlining the criticism on the part of the people of the government's weak foreign policy.

Rakuten's caricatures of prominent foreign personalities, such as President Yuan Shih-kai of China and the German Kaiser, caused the respective governments to file protests and were thus the source of international incidents. His cartoons also led to an exchange of notes between the governments of Japan and the United States regarding the exclusion of Japanese schoolboys from American schools. Some of Rakuten's cartoons were even reproduced in American magazines.

At that time liberalism was supreme in Japan, and cartoons were recognized as the perfect medium for social and political criticism. Nearly every daily newspaper, together with many magazines, printed cartoons. In fact cartoons were inclined to run amuck in the years up to 1926. Many influential government leaders were afraid of appearing in Rakuten's caricatures.
Another cartoon magazine of high artistic value came out at that time under the name of Hosun. It was published by a group of foreign-style painters who even went so far as to produce their own lithographic plates, not being satisfied with the work of specialists in that field. One of the contributors to the magazine was a German conversant with things Japanese.

**THE “CARICATURE CEREMONY”**

While Rakuten drew in the style of American cartoonists, Ippei Okamoto, who joined the staff of the Asahi Shimbun about that time, developed an individual style, a sort of sketch accompanied by a short story full of wit and humor. This style broke with all tradition and brought a breath of fresh air into the art of caricature in Japan. Gradually all newspapers began to print cartoons which followed Ippei’s style. The Imperial Diet sessions were a favorite subject of cartoons, and artists were present at every session. In view of the rising influence of cartoons, a number of artists, including Rakuten Kitazawa and Ippei Okamoto, founded the Tokyo Cartoonist Society. Their aim was to assure themselves of proper recognition by the public. To attract public attention, the society instituted its “caricature ceremony.” The idea of this was to redeem the cartoonists’ “sin” of having “desecrated” public and political leaders whom they had used as subjects for their cartoons. In the ceremony these leaders were “enshrined” as deities for worship.

The whole ritual was, of course, a farce. But it succeeded in drawing the public’s attention to the artists’ ability and importance. After ten years of existence the society was recently dissolved.

The period from the Russo-Japanese War until after the Great War was one of peace and prosperity for Japan. Hence there was little meat for cartoonists to get their teeth into, and no particular artistic development is noticeable during this period. Nevertheless, Kin Ikebe, one of the members of the Tokyo Cartoonist Society, frequently had the honor of having his paintings hung in the annual exhibitions of the Imperial Art Academy. This at least gave cartoonists more weight and dignity in the eyes of the public.

**PROLETARIAN AND NONSENСИAL CARTOONS**

From 1926 Marxism began to make its influence felt, especially in literature and the theater, and proletarian cartoons were produced by radical and progressive artists. One of these was Masamu Yanase, who imitated the style of the German caricaturist Georg Grosz. However, the proletarian cartoon was short-lived, as a result of strong pressure being brought to bear upon it by...
the government, the reason given being that it disturbed public peace and order. So before it could bear fruit the proletarian cartoon died. Nevertheless the influence of Georg Grosz has persisted.

Except for some government "thought control," Japan at that time was swayed by liberalism, and signs of fin-de-siecle decadence were amply evident. Erotic paintings were permitted to be exhibited to some extent, and the sophisticated city-dwellers were in pursuit of every new fad in painting, the more nonsensical the better. This tendency prompted many artists to turn to appropriate cartoons which were taken up with glee by editors in order to popularize their newspapers. This resulted in "nonsensical cartoons" reigning supreme. They were drawn for entertainment purposes only, and were condemned by many as having no social or political significance, no value in enlightening, strengthening, or comforting the public.

**CARTOONS SERVE THE NATION**

Since the Manchurian Incident of 1931, and fanned by the China hostilities and the European war, nationalism has taken the place of liberalism in Japan. This has led to mere laughter-provoking cartoons being abolished as unnecessary. They have been replaced by those which contribute to the guidance of life behind the front, to health promotion, and by those dealing with the current situation, pacification enterprises in China, and other undertakings in the public interest.

Cartoonists volunteered to go to China to devote themselves to propaganda and publicity. They have wholeheartedly placed their art at the service of the new internal structure of Japan and directed their work along the lines of Japan's great national effort.

In November 1940 a Japanese-German Caricature Society was organized, with the aim of exchanging cartoons of the two countries on the current situation. An exhibition of outstanding cartoons was planned by this society, and the necessary preparations were well under way, when the outbreak of the German-Soviet war prevented the exhibition's taking place.

In our present age of restlessness and speed the daily press has lost some of its political influence to the radio, and it is often said that people no longer have the time or patience to read an editorial. Many an editor knows this and has realized at the same time that the political cartoon is an ideal means of conveying an editorial thought to the reader in the shortest possible time and in a very effective manner. Moreover, until there is widespread television the cartoon is beyond the scope of radio.

Hence the importance of cartoonists to newspapers has, if anything, grown during the last few years. Most governments are equally aware of this importance, and it is no exaggeration to say that in Japan the cartoonists today have practically the same status as the men in the foremost battlefront. The present world conflagration is bound to entail a new blossoming of Japanese caricature on a really nationalistic basis.