Ernest Abraham Hart (1835–1898)

NOBORU KOYAMA

HART AS A MEDICAL DOCTOR

Ernest Hart, an ophthalmic surgeon and longtime editor of The British Medical Journal, was also an influential collector and connoisseur of Japanese art. He was a founding member of the Council of the Japan Society, London, established in 1891.

As Hart was keen to point out,1 the interest of doctors in Japanese art was not, by that time, a new phenomenon; earlier doctor-connoisseurs in the history of Japanese art collecting had included such distinguished figures as Engelbert Kaempfer (1651–1716), Phillip Franz von Siebold (1796–1866) and a contemporary collector, William Sturgis Bigelow (1850–1926). In the late nineteenth century, three of the most prominent British collectors of Japanese art were medical men: Ernest Hart, William Anderson (1842–1900), and Trevor Lawrence (1831–1913). Anderson2 was a professor at the Imperial Naval Medical College in Japan, and later a senior lecturer in anatomy at St Thomas’s Hospital in London. Trevor Lawrence, who was also notable as a collector of Japanese plants, had been educated as a Member
of the Royal College of Surgeons and worked for the Indian Medical Service for nearly ten years before becoming President of the Royal Horticultural Society. These three doctors joined the Japan Society when it was founded, with William Anderson becoming its first Chairman. Anderson’s collection, in particular, is famous, comprising more than 2,000 paintings at the British Museum. Trevor Lawrence, on the other hand, focused primarily on three-dimensional art objects, such as lacquer, porcelain and furniture. Between these two, Ernest Hart collected all kinds of Japanese art—objects, drawing and paintings.

Ernest Hart was born in London in 1835. He was the son of a Jewish dentist, Septimus Hart. He was educated at the City of London School, where William Anderson would also later study. He pursued medicine at St. George’s Hospital in London and qualified as a member of the Royal College of Surgeons in 1856, specializing in ophthalmology. He was appointed ophthalmic surgeon at St. Mary’s Hospital in London at the age of twenty-eight and worked concurrently as surgeon at the West London Hospital, and as the dean of St. Mary’s Hospital Medical School. After being the co-editor of The Lancet, he became editor of The British Medical Journal in 1866, at the age of only thirty, a position that he held on and off until his death in 1898. He married twice His first wife Rosetta, the daughter of Nathaniel Levy, died in 1861. The circumstances of her death were considered to be suspicious by some and led to later rumours for which there was little evidence that Ernest Hart might have poisoned her. The rumours even inspired a novel (Dr. Phillips: A Maida Vale Idyll by Frank Danby). In 1872, Hart re-married to Alice Marian, the daughter of Alexander Rowland. Alice Marian Hart (1850–1931) was trained in medicine at the University of Paris and the Medical School for Women in London. She was the founder of the Donegal Industrial Fund, and she became known for her contributions to the promotion of Irish cottage industries.

Alice accompanied her husband on his visit to Japan and also became a member of the Japan Society London when it was founded. Notably, during her time as a member, she read two papers: the first, entitled ‘Some Japanese Industrial Art-workers (Crape Printers)’, was delivered in June 1892; the second, ‘Impressionism in Japanese Art’, in December 1900. She was the first female member who read a paper to the Japan Society, and it is evident that she shared her husband’s passion for Japan.

HART AS A COLLECTOR OF JAPANESE ART

It is not clear when Ernest Hart first started to collect Japanese art. We know that he made a major acquisition around 1882. William Anderson had amassed a large collection of Japanese art during his stay in the country between 1873 and 1880. In 1882 he transferred