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THE PIPER

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BERTHA LUM

BERTHA LUM'S WOOD-BLOCK PRINTS

BY HELEN WRIGHT

NO country in the world is as rich in legendary lore as Japan. Her artists of the early schools were symbolists, their designs contained delicate allusions and imageries that it is only given to the appreciative, penetrating person to understand. Emblems in trees, emblems in flowers. The fir, bamboo and plum have their subtle significance. The animals, a mythology of their own; the fox and tortoise a special place in art and story. Cherry blossoms, lotus and wistaria by peculiar arrangement can cunningly reveal to those initiated, a welcome, a dismissal, a birth or death, while Gods and Demons preside over good and evil fortune.

These are all portrayed in prints, lacquer, metal work, textiles and embroideries and are understood by the artisan as well as the artist, for Art is everywhere in Japan, even in the humblest home. Nature and the simple scenes of daily life with which

they are familiar are seen in perfection in their prints.

Unfortunately the beautiful art of wood-block painting and printing is almost lost. It is now chiefly practiced for advertising purposes or for reproducing the work of the old masters in the medium, done so skillfully that even connoisseurs are often deceived. The artistic value of the old color print has become widely appreciated. It is no longer considered curious or bizarre and it is universally recognized that in the art of printing in color from wood blocks the Japanese are unequalled.

The technique seems simple: A key, called the "Key Block" is cut from the artist's design on thin paper which is pasted on a block of wood, usually cherry wood. The wood is cut away leaving the outline in relief. Then a block is cut for each separate color used. Absolute accuracy of register must be secured. The printer



THE LAND OF THE BLUEBIRD

BERTHA LUM

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places his colors on the block for each printing. The thin dampened paper is laid on the surface of the block and rubbed with a rubber which transfers the design.

The best prints were the product of three individuals, the artist who made the design, the engraver, who cut the blocks and the printer. These artisans were important factors in the making of successful prints as sometimes six or eight blocks were required for a print and great credit is due them as faithful interpreters. In spite of this they were generally "unknown, unwept, unhonored and unsung."

How difficult the skillful artisans are to find is entertainingly told by Bertha Lum, a maker of color prints after the Japanese manner, who has spent many months in the Land of the Cherry Blossom, studying the art. "I thought before I first went to Japan," she says, "that print makers were as plentiful as paper lanterns and kimonoas." But she found after searching in vain for weeks that they were not. The man said to cut the best blocks, was finally discovered far out in the suburbs of Tokyo, down back streets in a small house of four rooms.

Having once found him she set herself earnestly to learn the manner of cutting and printing from the blocks which she found was only simple in theory and as briefly described in books. After careful study and observation she brought her tools, brushes and blocks, all of which had cost ten times their value, back to America to further work out the process for herself.

Mrs. Lum was well equipped before taking up this special line of work, having studied drawing, color and design first at the Chicago Art Institute and then with Frank Holme and Anna Weston the well-known designer of stained glass.

In 1908 she went again to Japan and worked every day for three months in one of the shops cutting blocks, and then spent six weeks working with a printer. Printing proved to present the greatest difficulties, but these she surmounted with astonishing success.

Returning in 1911, Mrs. Lum took a house in Tokyo where she had several printers working under her direction, having become an expert herself.

Never satisfied and loving the country

and life of the Far East, she has been again and again each time securing more finished results from her study and experience. The mantle of some one of the old masters seems to have fallen upon her shoulders in her ready ability to seize the best combination of landscape and figure, to understand the legends and stories and to unite with harmony of color, rare decorative quality.

It is the beauty of the Orient seen with Occidental eyes, eyes that appreciate the delicacy of the Japanese print but adds a new and original note that seems to blend with the Eastern atmosphere and technique.

It may be only small figures crossing a bridge in a driving rain; a crowd of flower-kimonoed little children flying kites that the wind furls into birds and fish; a group of "Fox women," jinrikishas hurrying through the night, lighted by swinging yellow lanterns; or "Tanabata," clad in blue, standing on a bridge of birds spanning the Milky Way, on the seventh night of the seventh month, to meet her lover—all have distinct charm in their clear, vivid color and fanciful, romantic conceits.

Mrs. Lum's work has been repeatedly exhibited in this country and in Europe, and the Japanese themselves have paid her honor.

She had the pleasure of receiving a medal which was awarded her prints in the Fine Arts Palace of the Panama-Pacific International Exposition at San Francisco as she was *en route* to Japan in 1915.

One regrets that her prints reproduced herewith, which are among her latest, are only seen in black and white, for much of their charm is due to the delicate yet warm color tints in which the originals are interpreted, on paper so thin it could be blown away by the faintest breath of wind.

The "Piper," a Japanese rendering of our old friend the Pied Piper of Hamelin, stands on a hill surrounded by charming little children, behind whom a lovely yellow sunset glows and white gulls are seen flying about. The Piper's hat is blue and his quill scarlet, and the small tot with finger on lip wears a scarlet cap, the whole making a delightful color arrangement.

The "Land of the Blue Bird," must also be the land of the fairies, for fairy faces

peer out from the branches of a green fir tree, from which dangle yellow lanterns distinctly alight. The fairies from their hiding places behind pine needles are watching the flight of the birds. The blue-green of the sky mingles with the

brown and blue of the tree and the brilliant hue of the birds gives a charming accent.

Mrs. Lum possesses a charming personality with which she seems to have invested her subjects. Her art is never imitative but is fresh and individual.

SCULPTURE—A REPORT OF PROGRESS*

BY HERMON A. MACNEIL

THAT all the arts in America have had in recent years a phenomenal growth and appreciation I think we are all agreed, and it is a sign that our nation is reaching towards a saner life. In this recent development it is a pleasure to report that the art of sculpture has shown itself not a laggard, either in production, appreciation or usefulness.

Sculpture has ever been an art whose gamut reaches from the earth to the heavens. Out of the very clay of earth the sculptor through his spirit infused forms may carry the mind into the highest regions. Yet there are times when the clay remains mere clay; effort based on a disregard of nature's forms becomes meaningless. Tangible forms in permanent material have ever been the most lasting record that civilizations have left us, and in many cases sculpture has been the highest expression of those civilizations. Col. Roosevelt in his talk a while ago in New York before the Arts and Letters well said that art must follow the marked trails of a people, must express the blossoming of a nation. We have only to refer, in glancing over history, to such names as Pericles, Praxiteles, Michael Angelo, Donatello, Dubois, Rodin, St. Gaudens and many others to realize that without this art much valuable history of these civilizations would have been imperfectly recorded. To do this the sculptor must live in and be a part of his country. It has been proved by our own history that the sculptor who would express in his art the trails of marked currents of a people must himself be in those currents. In our middle period of sculpture fifty years ago when our men

flocked to Rome and lived and produced under the Thorwaldsen-Canova influence in the great art center of the world, their work showed no American spirit and may be said to have had no permanent significance. Could sculptors of today feel the sweep and moving sentiments of a country like India or China so as to vitally express them? Not at all.

Today in American sculpture we have a very curious condition. We have a constant demand for and desire to erect important public monuments, but this does not seem to be so much the outgrowth of a native taste and instinct for beauty in our common everyday possessions and surroundings as we would wish. The industries where this art of form could so happily be applied in a minor way are controlled by the unsympathetic production of the machine, and the tasteful work of arts and crafts societies finds an uphill road. Perhaps our prosperity and pride in our greatness or our love of grandiose display may be a cause of this. We have national enthusiasm and hero worship with too little individual taste and sense of the fitting in lesser things. Even after monuments are erected and the ceremonies over, it is difficult to tell whether people venerate or shun them. It is no uncommon sight to see them year after year grow thicker and thicker with dust and dirt. Personally we bathe daily but the effigies of our great men have no such thoughtful care bestowed upon them! One can only hope for a wider and more general understanding of taste and appropriateness.

A similar illogical development permeates our art schools today. Hardly a

*An address made at the annual dinner of the American Federation of Arts, Washington, D. C., May 18th, 1917.

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