

ORIENTAL LACQUER.

Japan Got the Art From China, Then Surpassed Her Tutor.

Lacquer has furnished a most varied material for one of the earliest industrial arts of China, and, though there are no authentic records of its origin, the process is already called an ancient one in a work published in 1387, in the first year of the Ming period, which proves that the art was known in as remote an epoch as the Sung dynasty. The culminating years of its development were reached in the reign of the Emperor Chien Lung (1736-96), who greatly encouraged its manufacture and had large quantities of lacquered objects made with which to furnish and decorate his palace. After his death the art seems to have declined in merit, and since that time little or nothing of any high artistic value in Chinese lacquer has been accomplished.

The Japanese first learned the process from China, but have since brought it to a point of perfection which surpasses the finest productions of the Chinese. In Japan, however, lacquer is applied solely to objects of comparatively small size, while in the Chinese empire it served to decorate screens and panels of tremendous dimensions. Lacquer is divided into two classes—painted and carved lacquer. Both kinds are sometimes inlaid with mother-of-pearl, ivory, jade and various semi-precious stones.

It was in the early seventeenth century, when Holland and Portugal began their trade with the remote east, and particularly with China, that marvelous empire teeming with so many extraordinary artistic manifestations, that Europe first began to realize the new and vast field of decorative elements which were contained in and revealed to her artists by oriental art.—Henry Coleman May in Scribner's.

THE CURIOUS BANANA TREE.

A Plant That Will Practically Grow While You Wait.

If a good sized, healthy banana tree is cut off a few feet above the ground during the wet season the tree will not die, but nine times out of ten will send up a new shoot from the center of the trunk and will grow fast enough to make up for lost time, for within forty-eight hours it will rear waving green leaves triumphantly above the severed trunk.

The secret lies in the fact that the trunk of the banana tree is not hard

and woody like other trees, but is really composed of undeveloped leaves wrapped tightly together in a spiral form. When the tree grows these rolled up leaves push upward and merely unroll. Thus no time is lost in forming buds and growing leaves as do ordinary trees. When the trunk is cut off it doesn't interfere with the growth of the leaves, because they are always pushing up from the center of the stalk. If you will roll a sheet of paper tightly and push against one end you will see exactly how the leaves are pushed up from the trunk of the banana tree, and if you cut the roll in two you will find that it doesn't prevent you from pushing out the center of the roll as before.

Although the banana tree repairs an injury so rapidly and well, the shoot formed from the cut stalk seldom bears fruit or flowers. As these shoots are rather and stronger than the original trees, however, they are much better adapted to withstand wind and storms, and the natives frequently cut the banana trees in order to force them to produce the strong, fruitless growth and to serve as windbreaks for other crops.—A. Hyatt Verrill in St. Nicholas.

A Creature From the Fire.

Aristotle believed that some creatures were capable of supporting life even though confined to the devouring element. He says: "In Cyprus, where the manufacturers of chalcitis (lime) burn it many days in the fire, a winged creature something larger than a great fly is seen emerging from the stone and leaping and walking about in the fire. These creatures perish immediately upon being removed from the furnace."

Saving the Innocent Ones.

Governor Stewart of Missouri once found eight convicts mowing the grass of the statehouse lawn. He questioned them. Seven of them said they were innocent men. The eighth said, "I stole or hawg, suh, an' it was a mos' stonishing good hawg!" "You're pardoned!" Stewart thundered. "Leave the prison at once. We must preserve our innocent convicts from contamination."

Safety First.

"They conceal the orchestra in this restaurant. Why?" "Well, wait till you hear it play."—Exchange.

Better a blush in the face than a blot in the heart.—Cervantes

GLACIERS OF ALASKA.

These Wonderful Ice Fields Are the Finest in the World.

A glacier is a gigantic field of ice pushing its appalling weight from the mountain fastnesses into the sea. Columbia glacier is from 300 to 400 feet high and extends for over four miles. It has been calculated that its area of ice would cover a large fraction of the entire state of Rhode Island.

It was a beautiful, inspiring spectacle spread before our eyes at high noon on the 29th of July on the way to Valdez. The summer morning had been warm—too warm for comfort on the sunny side of the steamer. About 11 o'clock the air began to cool. Cakes of ice and icebergs, some of them 100 feet long and over twenty feet high, began to drift by. Gradually in the distance we saw the outline of the marvelous and imposing Columbia glacier.

We need not go to Europe to see glaciers. Here they are within five days of Seattle, the finest in the world, and "all in America." Everybody was on deck, drinking in the magnificent spectacle. Nearer and nearer the Watson drew. The vast field of ice was sweeping across the horizon, showing masses of clear, translucent blue, masses of gray and others of shaded brown, sloping at the ends into a dark line of snow, ice and gravel.

The steamer moved cautiously until the excited passengers, with exclamations of delight, found that they were within 1,500 yards of the magnificent glacier. The warmth of summer had given way to the coolness of winter as the stiff breeze from the enormous mass of ice swept by. The glacier's sea line was streaked and splintered. At the center a mammoth cave extended a thousand feet. Enormous masses of the crystalline palisade broke off at intervals and fell into the sea with the sound of distant thunder.

The shrill bugle call to lunch sounded, but the passengers were deaf to the call that had been always welcomed. They stood enthralled and left the deck only when the steamer turned back on its course and the glacier was slowly lost from view.—John A. Schleicher in Leslie's.

Try Kneeling.

Don't sleep on your left side, for it causes too great a pressure on the heart. Don't sleep on your right side, for it interferes with the respiration of that lung. Don't sleep on your stomach, for that interferes with the respiration of both lungs and makes breathing difficult. Don't sleep on your back, for this method of getting rest is bad for the nervous system. Don't sleep sitting in a chair, for your body falls into an unnatural position, and you cannot get the necessary relaxation. Don't sleep standing up, for you may topple over and crack your skull. Don't sleep at all!—Insurance News.

Remarkable Lakes.

On the Mangishlak peninsula, in the Caspian sea, there are five small lakes. One of them is covered with salt crystals strong enough to allow man and beast to cross the lake on foot. Another is as round as any circle and of a lovely rose color. Its banks of salt crystal form a setting white as the driven snow to the water, which not only shows all the colors from violet to rosy red, but from which rises a perfume of violets. Both the perfume and the color are the result of the presence of seaweeds.

Russian Oddities.

The Russian Empress Anne built a great palace of ice and on occasion when the fancy seized her purchased several of her dainty courtiers by compelling them to pass the night in this great chamber of state, where they were almost frozen to death.

The Czar Paul constructed a room formed entirely of huge mirrors, where he spent hours walking to and fro in full uniform, a singular taste for the ugliest man in Russia.

Madeira Island Roads.

In the whole of the Madeira islands there are no wheeled vehicles, for the roads are too rough and mountainous. There are a few heavy sledges drawn by bullocks, but the favorite modes of locomotion are hammocks slung on poles and borne by natives and basket sledges. The latter are used for descending the mountains and are skillfully guided by a runner behind.

Good Mental Habits.

Worrying is a bad mental habit that reacts on one's health. There is only one cure, and that is training oneself into good mental habits. To do this persistence and patience are all needed. A week or a month is not likely to suffice. Keep at it just as you would to train a vine to grow up instead of down.

OUR DRYING EARTH.

Lack of Water May Bring About the Great Final Catastrophe.

The gradual but continuous diminution of the surface water of the earth is undoubtedly the chief element in our cosmic history since long before the advent of man.

If we study this loss in the two continents where water has reached such a degree of scarcity as to render its present rate of lessening an outstanding natural feature, the progress becomes more easily measurable. In Asia and Africa, the two "dry" continents, the disappearance of water annually is so great that it seems to justify the prediction of the French astronomer, Flammarion, that in a measurable space of time the human race is to find in this cause its final eclipse.

In Europe and America, the "wet" continents, water is still too plentiful to make its yearly lessening a matter of much moment, but they are certainly not exempt. If one compares, for instance, the facts disclosed in the histories of early Roman conquests with existing conditions, it would appear that what are now comparatively dry countries and fertile tracts were in those times an unending succession of marshes, with broad, sluggish rivers winding from mere to mere.

In Asia a comparison between the observations of the Russian explorers of fifty years ago with those of Sven Hedin reveals the fact that even in that short space of time the desert has taken in thousands upon thousands of square miles of once fertile country. Rivers and lakes have vanished, and even populous cities have been obliterated by the all conquering sand.

Just as rapidly are the great lakes of Africa shrinking. N'gami was a real lake less than fifty years ago; now it is no more than a marsh threatened with speedy extinction. Lake Rudolph is approached on one side by enormous plateaus of dry mud which were quite recently covered by the waters of the lake, and yearly a new belt is added to these mud flats. The process becomes alarming when one remembers that upon this great reservoir largely depends the fate of the Nile and of fertile Egypt.

Nothing is more fallacious than the old doctrine that evaporation and precipitation of moisture constitute a perfect cycle without the possibility of loss. As a matter of fact the earth is sucking up moisture like a sponge, and a vast quantity each day penetrates the surface to subterranean depths from which no natural cause releases it again and where it is apparently beyond the reach of man's utmost ingenuity.—St. Louis Post-Dispatch.

Malayan Tree Dwellers.

The Sakais, or tree dwellers, of the Malay peninsula build their houses in forked trees a dozen feet above ground and reach them by means of bamboo ladders, which they draw up when safely housed out of harm's way. The house itself is a rude kind of shack made of bamboo, and the flooring is lashed together piece by piece and bound securely to the tree limbs by rattan. These curious people are rather small and lighter in complexion than the Malays, though much uglier. They have no form of religion at all—not even idols—no written language and speak a corrupt form of Malay.

A Japanese Custom.

In Japan the well to do have almost always in the houses one room called the "chamber of the inspiring view." Its essential is a beautiful view, but taste is catholic in Japan, and the delightful view may be a blossoming cherry tree, a glimpse of a river, a miniature garden or only the newly fallen snow. In this delightful country they get up parties to visit the maple trees in the glory of autumn color or the fresh, untrodden snow, as in this country one gives theater parties and dinners.

The River Tinto.

There is in Spain a river called the Tinto, which has very extraordinary qualities. Its waters, which are as yellow as a topaz, harden the sand and petrify it in a most surprising manner. If a stone falls into the river and rests upon another they both become perfectly united and conglutinated in a year. It withers all the plants on its banks as well as the roots of trees, which it dyes of the same hue as its waters. No fish live in its stream.

Napoleon and His Mother.

Soon after Napoleon's assumption of the imperial purple he chanced to meet his mother in the gardens of St. Cloud. He was surrounded by courtiers and half playfully held out his hand for her to kiss. "Not so, my son," she gravely replied, at the same time presenting her hand in return. "It is your duty to kiss the hand of her who gave you life."



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THE STRONGEST WOOD.

Greenheart is More Durable Even Than Steel or Iron.

"Greenheart" is not the name of a play nor yet of a race horse; it is the name of a wood, said to be the hardest wood known to dendrologists. It is more durable even than steel or iron. The true greenheart is found only in British Guiana, where immense forests of the trees are to be found. Docks and piles of greenheart, it is said, will last longer than any other wood, the greenheart being absolutely impervious to the borings of the pile worm. In Dutch Guiana there is a tree known as greenheart, but it is said to be a different species and not the true greenheart.

The navy department is making tests of greenheart with a view to employing the wood for the packing of armor plates on battleships instead of teakwood, which comes from Samoa. It is said that the lock gates of the Panama canal are to be reconstructed of greenheart.

"This wonderful wood, greenheart, is grown only in British Guiana," said B. H. Gainfort of Demerara, British Guiana, recently. "The fifty large pairs of lock gates in the Manchester ship canal are built of greenheart from Demerara. Its durability in lock gate construction is limited only by the iron bolts and other fastenings used."

"The best grades of greenheart surpass iron and steel in durability when placed in water or in contact with soil. This extraordinary freedom from decay is due in part to the presence in the wood of an alkaloid known as biberine. Logs of greenheart have remained under water for 100 years and have kept in perfectly sound condition. Nansen's ship, the Fram, and the antarctic ship Discoverer were built of greenheart. Greenheart is said to be the strongest timber in use, with a crushing strength of 12,000 pounds a square inch, 65 per cent greater than that of English oak."—Washington Post.

Snakes.

The holes commonly seen in the fields are not "snake holes," though commonly called such. They are made by field mice, shrews and moles, often by the larger insects, and it is very seldom snakes even take refuge in them. Few snakes actually dig holes. They burrow in soft ground, the subterranean species, but these live, as a rule, in soft, yielding soil.

Ralph Waldo Emerson's Stove.

Ralph Waldo Emerson was a man of rare integrity and very particular about small things. One day a new cooking stove had been provided for his house, and, although the stove came very highly recommended, it proved thoroughly unsatisfactory and most provoking, as it did everything but what it was expected to do. After awhile the family was in despair, and some one suggested sending it to auction.

"What!" exclaimed Emerson. "Transfer our own perplexity to another pair of shoulders? No, never, unless the stove is labeled 'Imperfect.'"

And so "Imperfect" it was labeled and sold at a great discount.

Locating the Trouble.

One afternoon little Jimmy had been playing rather strenuously in the street. When he returned to his happy home he had an overheated look.

"Jimmy," exclaimed his mother on seeing the youngster, "come here a moment."

"Yes, ma'am," obeyed Jimmy, quickly hustling to his mother's side.

"What in the world have you been doing?" demanded the fond parent. "Your head is all perspiration."

"That's all right, mamma," was the indifferent response of Jimmy. "My roof leaks."—Philadelphia Telegraph.

The Chinchilla.

The tiny chinchilla, not more than twelve inches long, with a plump little body on short, stout legs, thrives only in the tropics. The little beasts have to be killed with the utmost precaution not to injure their fur, that grows on a skin nearly as tender and soft as a web of silk. A perfect skin not larger than a small pocket handkerchief is a revelation in fur growth. The texture of every hair is finer than floss silk, the length of it nearly an inch and the coloring about that of the soft, undyed marabou feathers.

A Different View.

"She was very complimentary to me last night."

"In what way?"

"She called me a human comet."

"And you consider that a compliment?"

"Sure; means I'm a hustler."

"Not exactly. She told me yesterday that she had just learned that a comet is composed of millions of feet of gas."—Houston Post.

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