

# Northern Messenger

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## A Peep at The Japs.

The principal apartments in all Japanese houses are at the back, looking out on miniature landscapes—for a landscape is skilfully dwarfed into a space often not more than thirty feet square.

A lake, a rock work, a bridge, a stone lantern and a deformed pine are indispensable, but whenever circumstances and means admit, quaintnesses of all kinds

and slabs of stone for crossing them in wet weather, grottoes, hills, valleys, and groves of miniature palms and bamboo; and dwarf trees of many kinds, of purplish dull-green hues, are cut into startling likenesses of beasts and creeping things, or stretch distorted arms over tiny lakes.

Not only do the Japanese show great skill in altering the natural appearance of trees and shrubs, to create a quiet sense

To say nothing of walls, windows, cups, pocket handkerchiefs, lanterns, string, wrappers, cloaks, hats, baggage-covers, paper is used domestically and professionally for all purposes for which we use linen, bandages, and cloths, and the consumption of it is enormous. It is so tenacious as to be nearly untearable, and even the finest kind—an exquisite and almost transparent fabric, soft like the most delicate silk 'crepe,' in which fine gold lacquers are usually wrapped—can only be torn with difficulty.

The lacquer tree does not attain a larger size than our ordinary ash, which it much resembles in general aspect. It is grown for the sake of that celebrated varnish which gives its name to the most beautiful of Japanese manufactures. The trees are all scarred with numerous incisions, from which the substance exudes in the early spring. As taken from the tree it is of the color and consistence of thick cream, but becomes dark on exposure to the air.

Lacquer is used for all kinds of purposes, from the golden shrines of Shiba and Nikko down to the rice-bowl in which the humblest coolie takes his meal. I can do more fancy Japan without lacquer than without paper, and combinations of the two are universal. The fine lacquered articles which are sold in the shops are enriched with five coats of the varnish, and good old lacquer bears the contact of live embers without blistering. The seed of the lacquer tree produces a good deal of oil. The smell or touch, or both combined, of new lacquer, produces in many people, both natives and foreigners, a very uncomfortable malady known as 'lacquer poisoning,' which in mild cases affects the skin only, but in severe ones the system generally.

The wistaria, which is largely used where strength and durability exceeding that of ordinary cables is required, seems universal. As a dwarf it covers the hills and roadsides, and in its larger growth, climbs the tallest trees, and occasionally kills them, cramping and compressing them mercilessly, and finally riots in its magnificent luxuriance over their dead branches. Some of its twisted stems are as thick as a man's body. In pleasure-grounds it is trellised and trained so as to form boughs of large size, a single tree often allowing a hundred people to rest comfortably under its shadow. On some rivers a strong cable of plaited wistaria crosses the water at a great height, so as to allow of the scows and the plank bridge which they carry, rising and falling with the stream.

Among the other ingenious devices are ropes or bolsters of stones, consisting of cylinders of variable length, and from two to four feet in diameter, made of split bamboo, woven in meshes small enough to prevent the escape of a six-pound stone. They are filled with water-worn boulders, and serviceable dams and embankments are formed by laying the cylinders one



are introduced. Small pavilions, retreats for tea-making, reading, sleeping in quiet and coolness, fishing under cover, and drinking 'sake'; bronze pagodas, rock caves, with gold and silver fish darting in and out; lakes with rocky islands, streams crossed by green bridges,—high enough to allow a rat or frog to pass under; a stork standing on one leg; lawns

of pleasure in the mind, but they know how to utilize them to the fullest extent. Their candles are made from a vegetable wax; for export the wax is carefully bleached. Over sixty kinds of paper are manufactured from the mulberry tree, while another species of mulberry is grown for the important manufacture of silk.