

[For OUR MISSION.]

Japanese Life in London.

BY ROBERT WALLACE.

ONE of the most interesting and instructive exhibitions at present in London, is the Japanese village at Albert Gate, South Kensington. The original village was opened some time ago, but being of light inflammable material, it was burned down. It has, however, risen, Phoenix like, from the ashes, and is now much more handsomely and substantially built, and rendered almost fire-proof by the use of a patent unflammable paint. It has also been enlarged, and a number of Japanese tradesmen added to the number of the inhabitants. After paying the necessary shilling, which is the "open sesame" to most of the London sights, we are ushered through a mat-covered door, and might imagine for the moment that we had left old England thousands of miles behind, and been suddenly transported to the interior of Japan. The first thing we notice is a bridge in front of us, which seems strangely familiar, reminding us of those we have all seen on the old-fashioned willow-pattern plates. It is painted bright vermilion, and looks very picturesque with the miniature ponds underneath, where gold fish are swimming about among the beautiful aquatic plants.

Crossing the bridge we come to a specimen of antique bronze work, in the shape of a vase ten feet high, worth thousands of pounds. Beyond this is a Japanese temple, with its peculiar turned-up eaves and peaked roof. Inside there is a large gilded god, and a number of smaller ones, with altar, lanterns, and all the other accessories of worship. In addition to this, each little shop has its own shrine. The village is laid out in five short streets, the houses being mostly two stories, the lower part being used as a shop, the upper as dwelling house. The shops are all open in front, the floor being about three feet from the ground, and the tradesmen squat on the floor while at work, with a low bench in front of them about the height of an ordinary stool. The first shop is that of a native artist, who is busily engaged illustrating books with those highly coloured pictures which delight the Japanese and Chinese. Next to him is a worker in ivory, and it is astonishing what delicate designs and beautiful forms they can produce with their primitive tools. We come next to a carpenter, who is hard at work making dainty little boxes, and it seems odd to Western eyes to see him do his work comfortably seated on a cushion on a matting floor. They work the plane the opposite way we do, drawing it towards them and holding the board or box with their toes, which they use almost as freely as their fingers. The carpenter's neighbour is a sandal wood carver who uses a piece of ebony instead of a hammer. The next shop is a most interesting one, you find a little Japanese squatting on his mat deep in the mysteries

of enamelling. The plate or bowl comes to him already engraved and he paints it very carefully with some preparation wherever the enamel is to go, then fills it in, the result being most beautiful designs in gorgeous colouring.

On the opposite side of the street is the Potter's stall which always has an interested crowd of spectators round it. The heavy wheel is turred by his feet, and such is the rate of speed he gets it up to, that he can make and finish a vase without having again to touch the wheel. After the vases, cups &c., that he makes are ready they are painted by his next door neighbour who had some very artistic specimens on his shelves. The lantern maker is a very ingenious fellow, as is also the umbrella maker; the way in which they build up a lantern or umbrella out of a piece of bamboo is very astonishing to our western eyes. In the tailor's shop you are surprised to see the needle held just the opposite way a Canadian would hold it, that is with the point from you and pushed with thimble on the third instead of the second finger. The hair dresser, clog maker, ornament maker, confectioner, &c., are all most interesting and instructive in their mode of working, but we must only mention one more, and that is the embroiderer. One man was doing a lovely white stork on a black ground, closely watched by the envious eyes of a number of ladies. He twisted his own silk as a shoemaker makes his thread, and then worked his pattern the same on both sides. The effect when the piece was made up into a screen was very beautiful. The Japanese all seem very much at home, men, women and children working and playing, laughing and chatting as freely and unconcernedly as if they were in their own native village and no Europeans within a thousand miles. There is an Amusement Hall where we saw some very clever slack wire-rope walking, the performer having a paper umbrella instead of a balancing pole.

Another performer while lying on his back did some extraordinary things with a large paper screen using his feet to balance and toss and turn it about as if they had been hands. A visit to the Village would be incomplete without a cup of Japanese tea served in native style by young Japanese girls. The dainty little table with a tiny tea service, each guest having a tiny tea pot to himself, reminds one of childhood days, but although the supply of tea is very limited it is very refreshing after our tour of inspection round the Village.

There are two Indian Villages in London on much the same plan, but for completeness, naturalness, and giving one a vivid idea of native life, manners, and customs, the Japanese Village undoubtedly bears the palm.

IF Almighty God were to promise to forgive all our sins upon condition of some one act being done, quite free from sin, by one of the fallen race of Adam, could any one such act be anywhere found?