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THE TEARS OF THE BIRDS

A VALUABLE SUBSTANCE WHICH IS GROWING SCARCER EACH YEAR.

Amber in Romance and in Commerce. What the Ancients Thought of It, and the Uses to Which Moderns Have Applied It.

(Copyright by American Press Association.) Amber has so long been identified with the luxury of perfect enjoyment behind a pipe or cigar that it is not pleasant to be reminded that the supply is gradually diminishing, and unless new deposits are found it will eventually be exhausted.

Familiar as most people are with the substance, few realize as they touch to their lips the pretty bit of color that it is a product of nature dating so far back in the ages that no record of its origin is attain-



AMBER HUNTERS AT WORK.

able. For all we know to the contrary, it was contemporaneous with Adam and Eve. The prophet Ezekiel speaks of "a great cloud with a fire infolding it and a brightness about it as of the color of amber." The classic writers of old compared it with the yellow tresses of the celestial divinities.

Sophocles sang of amber as "the concealed tear drops of the birds that mourned the death of Meleager." As tradition hath it, "the sisters of Meleager wept unceasingly after his death, until Diana changed them into guinea hens, which were transferred to the island of Leroc." A still older fable, coeval with Hesiod himself (who lived about 735 B. C.), and wrote an account of the birth of the world and the origin of the gods), relates how Prometheus paid the penalty of his drive across the heavens in the chariot of the sun, Zeus having killed him with a flash of lightning and hurled him down into the river Eridanus. His sisters, the Heliades, daughters of Helios (the sun), who had yoked the horses to the chariot, bewailed the death of their brother so bitterly that the gods, in compassion, changed them into poplar trees that shed "tears of amber." In later times the Eridanus was supposed to be the same as the river Po, because amber was found on its banks. Hence the Eriopides insula, or "amber islands," are placed at its mouth.

The philosophers showed themselves scarcely less imaginative than the poets. With them amber was a liquid produced by the rays of the setting sun, or an excretion of the ocean thrown up by its waves in the spring, or the gum of certain trees growing on some of the inaccessible islands in the Adriatic, which exuded from their branches with the rising of the dog star. Thales, the first to observe its electrical properties, was so struck with its power of attracting other substances that he did not hesitate to endow amber with the possession of a soul. Absurd as were the deductions, they constitute the germ of the modern science of electricity, which takes its name from elektron, the Greek word for amber.

Pliny arrived much nearer the truth than any of his predecessors when he alleged it to be a resinous juice oozing from old pines and firs and discharged into the sea, where, taking judgment, it was gradually hardened by the influence of heat or cold or the action of the sun. The origin of amber has also been a matter of dispute among naturalists, some describing it as an animal substance resembling beeswax secreted by an ant inhabiting pine forests, others maintaining it to be a fossil mineral of antediluvian origin; but according to the recent researches of Goppert, amber is nothing more than an indurated resin derived from various trees of the gum family, which resin is found in a similar condition in all zones, because its usual original depositories, namely, beds of brown coal, have been formed almost everywhere under similar circumstances.

A convincing proof that amber was once fluid is afforded by the fact that insects, leaves, drops of clear water or portions of metal, sand and other articles are sometimes found inclosed in it. Occasionally the insects are entire and in a fine state of preservation, but frequently their detached legs and wings indicate a hard struggle to



COFFINS OF ANCIENT INSECTS.

escape from the viscid mass. Bees, wasps, gnats, spiders and beetles have been observed in specimens, and because they were imbedded ages ago in the soft tree gum they are in demand by collectors and by college museums, where the inclosures are subjects of careful study by naturalists. The discovery of such a piece of amber is a bit of good fortune, for an equal value is attached to the unlucky prisoner.

Very beautiful specimens containing insects' ages old may be seen in the establishment of an amber expert and merchant in New York city. If he takes the fancy he will lead you into a queer-looking little workshop. The walls look as if they were afflicted with an eruption of carving tools. Odd looking lathes and polishing machines, racks and cabinets full of the raw and half completed material, are all around you. Pulling out a nest of drawers he will show you a great quantity of dull-looking, irregularly shaped lumps, and explain that no product is more valuable in price. One lot may be purchased for \$1 a pound, while another, that appears to the unpracticed eye not a whit more valuable, may be worth \$50.

The amber is found in different sizes,

varying from that of a nut to a man's head. A piece weighing one pound might be worth \$50, but a piece weighing twelve or thirteen pounds would be thought cheap at \$5,000. In the time of the Romans Nero used an amber drinking cup, and an amber dish represented the countenance and history of Alexander. The historian Gibbon tells us that among the Greeks the material was so greatly appreciated that the amphitheatres were adorned with either silver, gold or amber.

In modern times amber is chiefly obtained by sea combs after storms, when it is either picked up on the beach or sought after by men who walk up to their necks in the waves, with long poles to which nets are attached; or it is gathered from precipitous cliffs by men in boats, who go armed with poles and iron hooks, and loosen fragments of rocks in exploring them. The latter methods are not without danger to the amber seekers. Amber occurs in beds in Greenland, Prussia, France and Switzerland, but the greater portion of it comes from the southern coasts of the Baltic sea, where it is thrown up between Koenigsberg and Memel. It is also obtained by mining at a distance of 200 feet or more from the sea, and has been met with in gravel beds near London. Not many years ago specimens were found on Cape Sable, in Maryland.

In 1844 the amber gathering on the shores of the Baltic was more abundant than ever before known in the same spot. In the village of Kahlberg alone where the product was "farmed," it is estimated that twenty thousand thalers worth of amber was picked up in the course of a few weeks. It is supposed that this increased quantity resulted from the violent storms that prevailed on the coasts of the Baltic during the preceding winter, by which the treasure was thrown up from the bottom of the sea. One of the largest pieces of amber at present known is in the royal cabinet at Berlin, its weight being about eighteen pounds. It is a mistake to suppose that amber is only used to tip pipes or give additional glory to a choice cigar, for, being full of electricity, the smaller fragments are made into beads and worn by many people as a preventive of sore throat and croup. Children find relief in chewing upon the polished surface while cutting teeth. The Chinese wear bracelets made of amber, and use large quantities of it in the construction of idols.

Amber is designated as clear, cloudy or milky. The eastern nations prefer the milky variety, but Americans as a rule choose the cloudy variety because it is less easily imitated by gum copal. The material is worked with a chisel and turning wheel, the former having a razorlike edge, and the most beautiful objects are produced. Among the collections of an artist, which he preserves as evidence of the kind of apprenticeship he passed through, is an amber skull. It is less than three-quarters of an inch high, but the bones and articulations are distinctly marked. A magnifying glass is necessary to enjoy the marvelous detail of the carving.

Another specimen is a holder, with a hollow head of a monk for the cigar, the old recluse laughing; but you can only see the wrinkles in his face through a glass. There are still other representations in art



ARTISTIC WORK IN AMBER.

that will vie in perfection with the most famous statues, and yet there may not be half an inch of substance on which to carve the lines.

Take it all in all, amber in its history and results constitutes one of the most interesting studies in natural history, and to see the deft workman evolve from the crude mass forms of beauty on which the eye loves to linger is a luxury that is enjoyable by every devotee of high art.

FELIX K. DE FONSTAINNE.

German Views Regarding Tobacco. The most famous writers, physicians and artists of Germany have expressed their opinion recently on the use of tobacco. The aggregate verdict is that smoking and snuff taking are injurious, but so injuriously pleasant practices. The statement of Professor Paul Meyerheim, noted as an animal painter, is both interesting and amusing in this connection. He writes:

What I have to tell about my own smoking habit is far from interesting. I smoke indifferently, light cigars, and know little about the stronger and better grades. It may interest you to know, however, what my models in the Zoological garden think of tobacco. The common brown bears are passionate enthusiasts for it. When I blow smoke through the bars they push forward and rub their backs and heads against the iron over which the smoke passes. This is invariable. Not long ago I blew through a hollow stick a pinch of snuff into the nose of a sleeping lion. The brute sat up straight, sneezed violently, and then lay down to sleep contentedly. All goats, deer, llamas, and so on eat cigars and snuff with great eagerness. I once made a very ugly llama my friend by feeding it daily with snuff. I remember that one day the brute spat viciously on several soldiers, who were teasing him, and that one of them exclaimed, "Holy Moses! how his breath smells of snuff!" The big baboons also breathe with satisfaction the smoke from cigars. You see, do not smoke for my own pleasure alone.

A Scholar and a Recluse.

The recent death of Charles Jefferson Lukens, a scholar of distinguished merit, a native of Philadelphia, and for nearly

sixty five years a resident of that city, has reawakened public interest in his literary work. He was born July 18, 1826, and while a youth became noted for his crayon sketches and excellence as a water colorist. Prose literature and poetry, however, later on claimed a large share of his attention. Between 1848 and 1876 numerous and meritorious were the poems, essays, critiques and historical papers from his pen.

For the last twelve years of his life this ingenious writer (before so facile) used his pen but little. The workaday novelty craving world passed him by, and his latter days were those of a philosophic hermit. Much of his work will live in American literature, and those who knew him best sincerely mourn his loss.



C. J. LUKENS.

NEW YEAR'S EVE.

Published through The American Press Association.

Words and Music by H. W. HOPKINS.

Andante, con molto espressione

1. Slow - ly and sad the
2. Hark! 'tis the sound of

old year was dy - ing, As if it was loth to de - part; The chim - ing of the
mer - ry bells sounding, The old year has pass - ed a - way. Thro' the deep gloom its

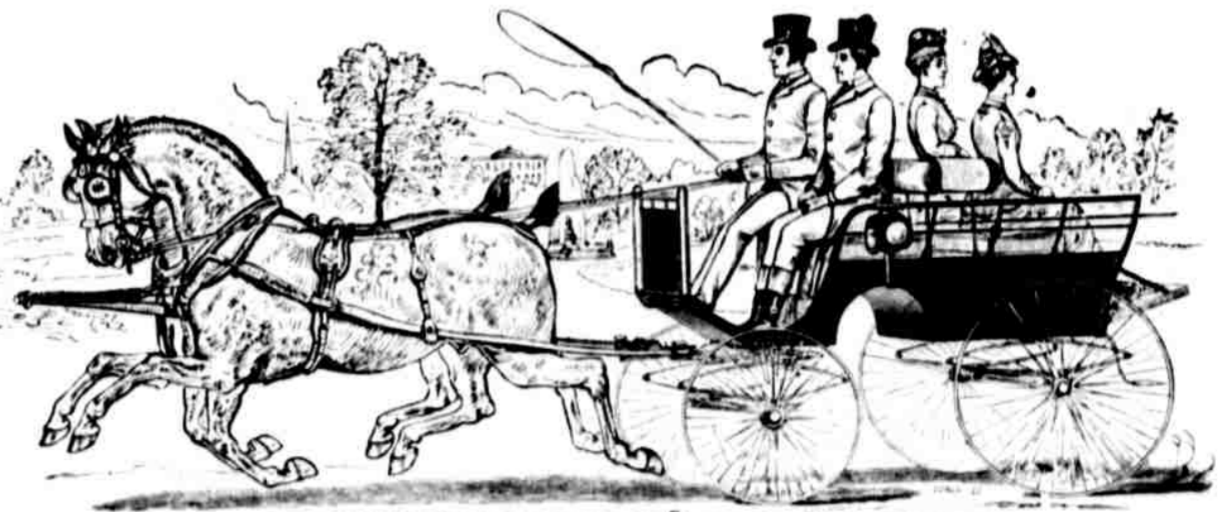
hours so swift - ly fly - ing, Like ech - oes, fell o - ver the heart. Out in the night the
sol - emn jour - ney wend - ing To realms of... end - less... day. Loud all a - round the

snow - y flakes were fall - ing, Glean - ing like gems of star - ry light; And the cold winds ne'er
joy - ous peals are swell - ing, To wel - come the glad - New Year's birth; Thro' all the land the

ceas'd their mournful call - ing, All thro' the long, wea - ry night,
glad - ning sto - ry tell - ing - Of peace and good - will on the earth.

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