

gum resins dissolved in a medium that evaporates easily, leaving a solid transparent film. It is the sap of the *Rhus vernicifera*, a species of sumach, and the sap derived from the branches and from the stem of the tree differs essentially in character. Crude lacquer is a greyish, viscous liquid of creamy consistence and is strained through linen in order to separate foreign matter, and is then allowed to thicken by evaporation in shallow wooden vessels, and, when exposed to the air, becomes a dark-brown colour, and it possesses singular properties as it will only dry and harden in a damp atmosphere, and within a range of temperature of 68° and 80°, while near the freezing point it will not harden at all. Modern and inferior lacquer appears to be adulterated with materials which hasten its drying. The finest qualities are only applied in the thinnest films, the high polish characteristic of the finest work being produced by friction with the hand, dressed with a powder of calcined deers-horn and a little oil. In the production of a piece of thin black lacquer there may be thirty-three separate processes, twelve of which are applications of thin coats of lacquer requiring the object to be dried to harden nineteen times for periods varying from twelve hours to three days, and at most of the stages of the preparation the surface has to be gone over and polished as truly as if it were the final operation. This would require, at least, twenty-two days, and, when the article has to be decorated in gold or colour, the amount of time expended may be greatly extended. Most of the objects have pictures or ornament in gold in low relief; in this case the design is painted on in lacquer, and the gold added in fine powder, not as gold leaf, the effect being often heightened by small pieces of gold foil in tiny quadrangles or other shapes, the pieces being laid on one by one with the greatest care. The *nashiji* or aventurine grounds have powdered gold dusted on. Usually the base of such objects is wood, but the kind of wood varies with the object. Some of the specimens are elaborately carved so as to show different layers of variously tinted lacquer. Wood grain is often most faithfully imitated as in Case xx. B, 64-66, and Case xvii., 29 and 37. Other specimens are elaborately coloured, for instance, there are singularly faithful imitations of the mineral *lapis lazuli*, with little flakes of gold introduced to represent pyritic matter present in the natural mineral, and perhaps the specimens representing imitations of metal work and stone show the wonderful manipulative skill of the artists better than the purely decorative work.

It has hardly been possible to shorten this still inadequate description, and but little space is left for reference to the objects themselves, so we must only point to one or two marvels of skill which are really fascinating to those who can admire delicate, dainty work. Look, for instance, at No. 8, Case xi.; it is an *inrō*, or case, of black ground, *poudré* with gold in places, with delicate decoration of red shading into gold, varying in different lights; the decoration is autumn maple with falling leaves; it belongs to the last century, bears the signature of Koma Kihaku, and all this perfection is concentrated in the adornment of a little article barely 2½ inches high. Perhaps the next most beautiful thing in this case, though all are perfect, is No. 17, also an *inrō*, which has a black ground, uniformly *poudré* with pale gold, while its decoration consists of two mother-of-pearl sea fish,

and one red-lac fish, in relief, lying on sprigs of bamboo grass. It is an exquisite little thing, but we have no space to do anything like justice to the marvels which are to be seen, and must conclude by referring to the singular and interesting "Game of Perfumes," which is played with the aid of little appliances made in lacquer. The game is an ancient one, which was confined to the court nobles and aristocracy, and, in playing it, various kinds of incense are burnt in a ceremonial manner. The incense is burnt on plates of mica, and the players have to guess the names of the incense or mixtures of incense burnt, and to indicate their decisions by placing counters, with which each player is provided, on a lacquered board. No very accurate account of the game has been published in any Japanese work, but scented flowers were prohibited as the decoration of the room in which it was played. It is very interesting to remember that while we Europeans think of scent in connection with a flower or perfumed handkerchief, the Japanese seem to have cultivated the artistic perception of shades, or, as it were, *tones* of scent, of which analogies are presented by the musical sense.

Enough has been written to show the unusual interest of this Exhibition, and we will return to it and deal with the metal work next week.

Books of the Week.

"PAGAN PAPERS."*

THE papers that are contained in this little volume appeared first in the weekly pages of the *National Observer*, when they were like the scent of wild gorse across a windy common of tortuous and cynical criticism. Pagan Papers is a *real* out-of-doors book, and the moment the reader opens these charming essays he forgets London, bills, and worries, and the sound and charm of out-of-doors life possesses his soul, if he has one. "The Rural Pan" (an April essay) sings in beautiful prose of the joys of a holiday of solitude on the pleasant Surrey Downs in contrast to "the Pulman Express and a short hour with a society paper, anon brown boots on the pier, and the pleasant combination of Metropolis and Monopole." Alas! as Mr. Grahame truly says, "the iron horse has searched the country through—east and west, north and south—bringing with it commercialism, whose god is Jerry, and who studs the hills with stucco, and garrottes the streams with the girder."

"An Autumn Encounter" tells how the author, after a long day's "sweltering and delightful tramp," was haunted by a scare-crow.

"Through now on the level it is still sultry and airless, an evening breeze is playing briskly along the slope where he stands, and one sleeve saws the air violently; the other is pointed stiffly heavenwards. The sins of the world are a heavy burden and a grievance unto you. You have a mission you must testify; it will forth in season and out of season. For man, he wakes and sleeps and sins betimes, but crows sin steadily without any cessation, and this unhappy state of things is your own particular business. . . . And the jolly earth smiles in the perfect evening, and the corn ripples and laughs all round you, and one young rook

*"Pagan Papers." By Kenneth Grahame. London: Elkin Mathews and John Lane. 3/6 nett.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)