

## PICTURESQUE CHINESE KITES.

BY WALTER L. BEASLEY.

The new Chinese exhibition now being installed and arranged for early exhibition in the American Museum of Natural History, contains many novel and extremely interesting objects, quite new to the eyes of the Occident. To the liberality of Jacob H. Schiff, and a few other friends of the Museum, among them Mr. Morris K. Jesup, the present exhibit is due. The field work was intrusted to Dr. Berthold Laufer, who had previously carried on Eastern researches for the Museum among the Amur River tribes of Siberia and the island of Sakhalien in the Okotsk Sea. One portion of the collection is devoted to the popular amusements of the country. The most curious and striking specimens of this section are a varied series of picture kites, unusually picturesque in shape and ornamentation. The kites are wonderful specimens in their way, and portray a deal of ingenuity, especially their love of art and decoration, which runs through the whole life of the Chinese people, from their highest creations to the most commonplace objects of amusement. The kites were obtained in the vicinity of Peking, and they represent one of

the leading outdoor diversions of the sons of both mandarins and nobles, as well as the native population. In China kite-flying is a national pastime. They are flown on certain holidays, one of the most popular being the festival of Ascending on High, occurring on the ninth day of the ninth month. On this occasion the hills and open country are lined with great processions of kite-fliers, both young and old, who devote the whole day to this sport. The universal use of the kite is not looked upon as a form of amusement alone, but has a sort of religious interest connected with it, and is regarded as symbolic of the human soul, which is likened unto a bird in flight. Each particular kite, therefore, has its meaning and conveys some emblematic idea. A story or legend is suggested, and some famous god or warrior's face is usually depicted. The likenesses of various animals and insects, more or less believed to be creatures of good luck rather than of evil portent, such as frogs, fishes, fireflies, owls, and butterflies, form the design of most of them. A great number, however, are constructed in double-like fashion, representing theatrical scenes and heroes of their ancient drama. Two of these portrait kites are shown in the accompanying illustrations. In most cases, excepting those of the women, the faces are covered with long-bearded, grotesque masks. A pair of boy-wrestlers in action and a typical Chinese maiden linked by the side of a figure having a ferocious animal head, evidently an Oriental version of Beauty and the Beast, form some of the curious shapes.

Probably the most wonderful and ingenious achievement of the Chinese kitemaker is the one designed to be a counterpart of the great Flying Dragon. This is unquestionably the longest and most fantastic amusement device that has ever been constructed for aerial flight. From head to tail it measures nearly forty feet, and is made to fold up, accordion-like. The fierce large head of the dragon, so famous in Chinese mythology, having long protruding horns, huge eyes, and gaping mouth, forms the front of the kite. Extending from head to end, and constituting the body portion, are a series of bamboo sticks, running crosswise, to the center of which are fastened twenty-five or more pasteboard disks, a foot in diameter. These are painted in circles of black, red, yellow, and white, representing the all-seeing eyes of the mighty dragon. A tail portion, of narrow silk strips, is arranged to the last piece of bamboo. By a mechanical contrivance, the curved pieces of pasteboard forming the eyes are made to revolve by the wind while the kite is being flown. Seen in the air, with its serpentine-like motion, its huge, glaring eyes, swiftly twirling in their sockets, the effect is said to be astonishingly realistic, producing an awe-inspiring scene, to the Chinese mind, at least, of the powerful demon

of the Upper World. While being flown, a cord is attached to three or more points of its length, in order to keep it under control. In strong winds, several men are required to hold the reel. Undoubtedly we have here one of the first and most ancient patterns of flying-machines, thousands of years old, which modern investigators have utilized and brought to almost successful perfection. Dr. Stewart Cullen, of the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences,

they employ. Certain days are set apart for kite-flying in Japan, varying in different localities. In one of the current stories of Japan a famous kite episode is recorded. In the sixteenth century a noted robber and bandit, Ishikawa Goemen, boldly tried to steal the celebrated Golden Fish surmounting the castle of Nagaya, by soaring up one stormy night by the aid of a large kite. Since then the flying of kites of an unusual size has been prohibited in the province of

Owari. One of the peculiar sports which has been evolved out of kite-flying, and which is extensively practised in Japan and Corea, and to a limited degree in China, is that of kite-fighting. For this aerial warfare, silk cords or strings are used, which have been dipped their entire length in fish glue and a preparation of powdered glass or porcelain. The kites are sent up, and the moment the strings become crossed the battle begins. The manipulators must let out their lines, and the one that becomes tense is cut through at once. When half a dozen or more become entangled, the sport lasts nearly a day. Money is frequently wagered and special matches arranged by experts in kite-fighting. Besides the wide array of unique picture kites

here shown and described, the new Chinese collection contains rich examples of the best *cloisonné* work. Numerous native paintings and drawings, illustrating their religious belief and worship, medical methods, the art of printing and bookmaking, together with a thousand or more volumes in Chinese script on all subjects, were obtained. When fully completed and installed the exhibit will be the largest and most comprehensive in this country, covering as it will nearly the whole range of Chinese life and industries. It is the ultimate hope and aim of the committee that the present collection should but mark the beginning of an exhaustive educational one, to be increased in the future by additions from all the other Asiatic countries, which would thoroughly represent the whole domain of their various cultures. The installing of

such a collection, with its unequalled opportunities for practical research and study, would, it is thought, give an impetus to Columbia University which might lead to the establishment of an Oriental School, like those of London, Berlin, Leyden, St. Petersburg, and Paris, in which students could be trained for the diplomatic and consular service, and where business men, intending to locate in the Far East, could be made thoroughly acquainted with the products, needs, and commercial possibilities of these lands. The chair of Chinese recently inaugurated at Columbia, under Prof. Frederick Hirth, is the first successful step in this direction.

## STAFF—ITS USE AND TREATMENT.

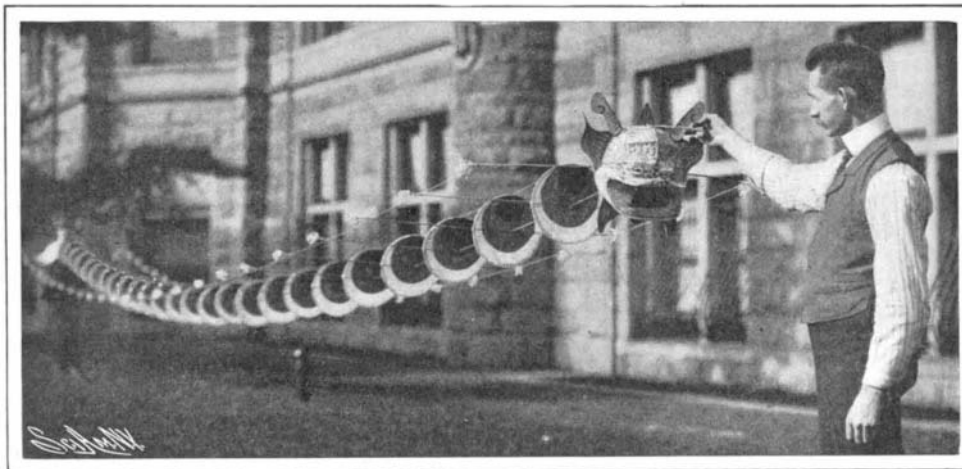
BY J. S. CRAWFORD.

The crest of Art Hill in the Exposition grounds at St. Louis commands a view of the general Exposition buildings. These buildings are finished in staff. The pedestals, columns, capitals, pilasters, curtain-walls, friezes, pediments, arches, masks, figures, and statuary groups are molded of that material.

From the view above indicated the facades, architectural members and enrichments look like stone. They appear strong, solid, and permanent. This view from the hill has been designed to give the buildings perspective and emphasize their massiveness. The tints harmonize with stone colors. Like all pleasing constructions, the elevations are simple and stately; they please by the absence of fussy details; they impress by the restraints of dignity. Many times I have gone upon Art Hill with delegations in which were Congressmen, State officers, commissioners, and men high in the professions—all agree that strength, beauty, and dignity are the predominating features of these Exposition buildings.

Yet they are temporary. At best they are expected to last little more than a half-dozen years.

When I concluded to write this article on staff, it did not occur to



A Chinese Dragon Kite Forty Feet Long.

a recognized authority on games and amusements of the East, states that the first invention and origin of the kite is attributed to a Chinese general named Han Sin, who in the second century B. C., while engaged in besieging the fortifications of Kao Tsu, the founder of the Han dynasty, sent up a kite to measure the distance from his camp to the palace, which he had planned to enter by digging a tunnel, through which his army would come out about the center of the palace courtyard. Japan and Corea also imitate their Chinese neighbors in kite-flying, a custom which was probably borrowed and introduced from the latter country, though their kites are not nearly so artistic and fanciful in design as those of the Chinese. The Japanese are likewise ardent lovers of kite-flying, and come next to the Chinese in the variety of forms



The Wrestlers—A Decorative Design on a Chinese Kite.



The Captive Maiden—A Scene Painted on a Chinese Kite.

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