



**CHILDREN'S
CORRESPONDENCE
COLUMN.**

Any boy or girl who likes to become a cousin can do so, and write letters to 'Cousin Kate, care of the Lady Editor, 'Graphic' Office, Auckland.

Write on one side of the paper only. All purely correspondence letters with envelope ends turned in are carried through the Post Office as follows:—Not exceeding 1oz. 4d; not exceeding 1oz. 1d; for every additional 2oz or fractional part thereof, 4d. It is well for correspondence to be marked 'Press Manuscript only.'

Please note, dear cousins, that all letters addressed to Cousin Kate must now bear the words 'Press Manuscript only.' If so marked, and the flap turned in, and not overweight, they will come for a 4d stamp in Auckland, but a 1d for every other place.

**THE 'GRAPHIC' COUSINS
COT FUND.**

This fund is for the purpose of maintaining a poor, sick child in the Auckland Hospital, and is contributed to by the 'Graphic' cousins—readers of the children's page. The cot has been already bought by their kind collection of money, and now £25 a year is needed to pay for the nursing, food and medical attendance of the child in it. Any contributions will be gladly received by Cousin Kate, care of the Lady Editor, 'New Zealand Graphic,' Shortland street, or collecting cards will be sent on application.

Dear Cousin Kate,—At last I am sending our long promised photograph. It was taken in the Recreation Grounds on the day of the Floral Fete. The weather was perfect, and the procession a large one; very pretty were the many exhibits, and Tommy obtained 2nd prize. There were two bands in attendance, so there was no lack of music, and the scene from the lawn was one of bright animation. Everyone seemed to be enjoying themselves. Our flower garden is looking nice, but the weather is so changeable at present that it has spoilt many of the choice roses, etc. We have a lot of new chickens out; they are getting on very well; and another new foal is added to our list of horses, numbering eleven all told. I noticed that some of the old cousins are rather backward in writing to our page. I wonder what can be the matter. Most of them were capital correspondents. I am afraid our photo will be too large for the page; if so we shall have to get it taken on a smaller card; and will you kindly forward it to the enclosed address. Christmas is very near now, and it seems no time since Christmas 1897. I suppose the Auckland Exhibition will draw crowds of people from all parts of New Zealand. Nearly every one I speak to say they are off to Auckland. I have three large pots of ferns; the leaves of them must be quite two feet long. They are so lovely and graceful looking. I also have the puna pots and other small vessels of ferns; they are growing beautifully. My Prince of Wales' feather fern came to grief; a chicken roosted on it one night and trampled it out of recognition. I tried to restore it to life, but my efforts were in vain. Hoping yourself, the little child in the cot, and all the cousins are enjoying perfect health. I close with love from Cousin Maud.

[Many thanks, dear Cousin Maud, for the pretty photograph. I will see about getting it done at once for the Children's Page, and will return it to you afterwards to the address you give so sensibly on the cover. How lovely your ferns must be! You are a first-rate gardener evidently. Are you, too, coming to the Exhibition?—Cousin Kate.]

Dear Cousin Kate,—Our photo is going at last. I hope you will like it. The Floral Fete is all over. I enjoyed myself so much, and my dear

little pony, does he not look nice? I have just given him half a loaf, and he is bunting me in my back for more. We had such fun trimming him up for the Fete. His hair was in rags for two days, and it looked just the same when it was taken out. I hope you are well, and all the cousins. We have such dreadfully wet weather, now, and so close and warm. Maud is writing by this mail. She is away to keep house for my brother down the coast. I must close now, dear Cousin Kate.—I am, your affectionate Cousin Nellie

[I am so glad to have the nice photograph, and to hear from you both again. We are not having a Floral Fete this year but some tournament affair instead. Cousin Maud is an important personage. Are you all alone at home now.—Cousin Kate.]

**A JAPANESE PICTURE
STORY.**

(By BARNET PHILLIPS.)

The stories that have been written about pictures are to be divided into two general categories—those indicating the skill of the artist, and those relating to the performances of the pictures themselves. Both of these merge, since they attest the ability of the artist. There is a third kind of story, dwelling on the mishaps of painters, which accidents, however, in the long run, invariably aid the artist.

The supernatural must have been called into play at the dawn of civilisation, when the first artist scratched with splinter of flint an animal form on a bone. Pygmalion, who carved a woman so life-like that he prayed to Venus to give Galatea flesh, blood, and a soul, must in an earlier form have been a story of the most remote antiquity. We find traces of this myth in Egyptian work. To a South Sea Islander carved idols are not stocks nor stones, but living gods. The most acute Hindoostane does not separate his brzen images from the personalities of his deities.

Nothing is older than the stories of the supreme skill of the artist which the old Greek repeated. The common type of this legend is the picture with the figs painted on it, which were so natural that the birds pecked at them. The modern Orientals have embellished this story in many ways. The Persians will tell you that the birds actually carried a pomegranate out of a picture and fought over the fruit. One of the pomegranates slipped from the beak of a bird and tumbled down to a garden below. The over-ripe fruit broke, the seeds were scattered, and where they fell a pomegranate tree grew, which will be shown you to-day in a court-yard in Ispahan.

We have the very old joke about the slab of stone painted so exactly like a log of wood that it floated. The Japanese have worked up the idea in many ingenious ways. They had a painter of the tenth century who drew a crystal ball so perfectly that when the sun shone on it, it behaved as would a lens, and would light tinder.

The Greeks tell of an artist who was dissatisfied with the flecks of foam in the mouth of a dog he was painting, and in anger threw a sponge at his picture, and lo! where the sponge had struck the painting there was the froth required.

This is told of a bronze artificer who never could be satisfied with the ocean he was making up, into which his hero was wading. He set his work on a window. A storm arose, there was a blinding flash of lightning and the bronze was hurled to the ground. When the artist picked up the bronze, a portion of the metal representing the water had been fused, and there was the rolling, undulating sea, such as no mortal hand could ever have produced.

Another story is about a second

bronze-worker, who was a great artist, but an intemperate one, for he drank too much sake. The man had fashioned a deity in bronze which did not satisfy him, though he had worked on it for ten years. Do what he would, the figure showed traces of the long toil he had lavished on it. Though given to his cups, he was apparently a conscientious artist. Putting his bronze in his pocket or up his sleeve, the artist determined to commit suicide, and so plunged into a great tub of fermenting rice, from which sake is distilled. When the sake-maker emptied his tubs there was the artist dead, and his bronze, but the work had been perfected. The fermenting rice had smoothed down the hard lines. The bronze was admirable, and so the artist's death conferred on him a certain amount of heroism—that is, according to Japanese ideas of heroism.

The newest story of artistic performance and of higher criticism is Japanese, and for the lesson it conveys has its value. There was a Shogun of the fourteenth century who was the art critic of his time, because he never saw a screen or a bronze or a china decoration without finding some fault. In his court all his retainers followed the Shogun in depreciating whatsoever was shown to them.

In the court of the great man was a painter, the most distinguished of his time, and this artist became very tired of the adverse criticisms passed on his work. The Shogun ordered a screen, leaving the choice of the subject to the artist.

'As you are very slow,' said the Shogun, 'you may take a year to paint your screen. Time enough, I think, to assure us that there will be nothing careless in your work.'

The artist accepted the commission, and asked for leave of absence, which was granted to him. He was away for eleven months, and it was within three days of the end of the year when he paid his respects to the Shogun.

'Exhibit at once your so-called work of art,' said the Shogun.

'I have not yet commenced it, may it please your Dignity,' answered the artist.

'And in three days do you expect to show me a picture worth my looking at?' inquired the Shogun.

'I have travelled all over the country for that work which it has pleased you to commit to my care, and it will be ready on time,' replied the artist, humbly.

When the last day had come the artist said his screen was ready, and that it was hanging in a particular room in the Shogun's palace. The high dignitary and his court were present, and examined the picture.

What was painted was simplicity itself. There was a river, and in the stream a boat was moored, with a furled sail. The banks of the river were lined with rushes. There were a few trees, with a bird here and there perched on the boughs. A rabbit was nibbling the grass. In the distance was a high mountain.

'That is suppositively water, if I am not mistaken,' said the Shogun.

'It's very sluggish,' remarked the pipe-bearer.

'Those rushes—ahem!' interposed a courtier—'are they not absurdly stiff?'

'And, dear me,' chimed in the secretary, 'what birds! stuffed birds on boughs are too preposterous!'

'The boat—such a boat as that never could float. Is it meant for a boat or a rock?' inquired the master of the robes.

'The fact is,' said the Shogun, 'it is an idiotic performance. If wants life, go, dash, imagination. It is dullness personified. It is nothing but 'practice work, and entirely unfitted to grace our elegant abode. Treasurer, pay this man for his trouble. A full year's wages, such as you would give to a weeder of rice.'

'Our Highness was always a liberal patron of the arts,' said the treasurer. 'And though generous, most discriminating, for really the picture is overpaid,' said the courtiers.

The painter smiled, slowly walked to where the screen was hung, and plunged head foremost into his work. Then, to the great amazement of the Shogun and his court, a splash was heard. Now the water rippled and the boat began to rock. The rushes on the bank of the stream nodded and

bent and swayed, as if with a passing breeze. The birds flew from bough to bough. The rabbit scampered away. There was a figure in the boat, and presently the anchor was hauled up and the sail was set, and the little craft, heeling over with the wind, sped up the stream, and now a landing was made at the foot of the mountain.

Next a little man was seen slowly climbing up the mountain, and when the mountain-top was reached the figure bowed respectfully to the Shogun and the court and disappeared, as if descending on the other side of the mountain.

Then a loon came to the immediate foreground of the screen, and flapped his wings, and said, in a very courtly Japanese, these words, which may be rather carelessly translated into English in this way:

'You are all a set of ninnies, for you don't know a good thing when you see it. Ta, ta!'

The courtiers were so enraged that they drew their two swords and wanted to hack the loon and the screen to pieces. But when they looked at the screen, they saw a big tear in it, with falling flaps of silk, on which the work had been painted. It was where the artist had made his exit. This is the Japanese fable for critics.

FLY TALK.

Since the departure of Professor Garner for Africa, to continue his study of the language of monkeys, a French man of science, Doctor Galtier, has published the results of a long and careful study, made in his poultry house, into the language of hens. In his opinion, there are many 'words' concealed in the utterances which we ordinarily interpret merely with cut-throat and cock-a-doodle-don.

These studies in animal dialects have now been followed by another, which is perhaps, most curious of all. An English inquirer, armed with a microphone, or sound-magnifier, has been listening patiently through long hours to the curious noises made by house-flies, and reports his belief that they have a language of their own.

The language does not consist of the buzzing sound which we ordinarily hear, which is made by the rapid vibrations of their wings in the air, but of a smaller, finer and more widely modulated series of sounds, audible to the human ear only by the aid of the microphone.

Probably this fly conversation is perfectly audible to the fly ears, which, as every schoolboy knows who has tried to move his hand slowly upon them, are very acute.

The hope is expressed that, since the heretofore inaudible whispers of flies have been detected and recorded, some inventor may construct a microphone which will enable us to make out the language of the microbes, and so surprise them in the horrible secret of their mode of operations!

QUITO WATER PORTERS.

Around a fountain in one of the principal squares of Quito assemble every morning the city's agnadores. These water porters differ from the less energetic ones of some South American cities in carrying their jars on their backs instead of on the backs of mules. 'Their earthen jars are deep, have a wide mouth, and hold about forty litres,' writes the author of 'From the Andes to Para.'

The porter carries it on his shoulder fastened with leather straps. He never detaches himself from his jar either to fill it, or to transfer his contents to that of his customer.

He turns his back to the fountain so that the jar comes under one of the jets of water in the jar, and his ear is so well trained that he always walks away at the exact moment when it is filled to the brim.

Arrived at your house, he goes to your jar, makes a deep bow—and disappears behind a torrent of water. I could never receive without laughing the visit of my agnadore, the respectful little man who bowed to me behind a cataract of water.

She: 'I wonder who first said, "It is better to be born lucky than rich!"'

He: 'Some old fool whose wife married him for his money. I fancy.'