

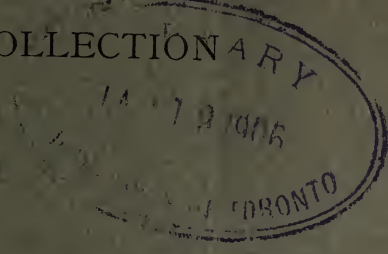
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JADE COLLECTIONARY



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Heber R. Bishop

HEBER REGINALD BISHOP AND HIS JADE COLLECTION¹

By GEORGE FREDERICK KUNZ

Among American men of wealth who have been eminent first as collectors and amateurs in various branches of art and science, and then as patrons and public benefactors in the same departments, few names will go down to posterity with greater honor than that of the late Heber R. Bishop, of New York, who died December 10, 1902, leaving memorials in both the great public museums of the metropolis.

Heber Reginald Bishop came of New England stock, his family having emigrated from Ipswich, England, to the Massachusetts colony in 1685, settling in Medford, Massachusetts. Here the subject of this notice was born in 1840. He received a mercantile training in Boston, and at the age of nineteen went to Remedios, Cuba, to engage in the sugar business, which at that time was very flourishing. Two years later, in 1861, he founded the sugar refining and exporting house of Bishop & Company, and for the next decade or more he lived principally at Remedios, although frequently visiting the United States. The business was extensive and prosperous until the disorders, arising from the Cuban revolution, began in 1873, when Mr Bishop saw that the disturbed condition of the island would ultimately ruin his financial prospects. He therefore disposed of his business at a figure far below its value, and returned to the United States with a considerable fortune.

Soon after establishing himself in business he married Miss Mary Cunningham, whose father, James Cunningham, resided at Irvington on the Hudson, and there Mr Bishop established a summer home. He soon became actively interested in various large enterprises connected with gas, iron, and railway interests, and was promi-

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nent in the building of the Third Avenue Elevated Railroad in New York City. Ere long he turned his attention to industrial developments in the west, particularly to several leading railroads of the northwestern states. He was a pioneer in capitalizing and developing the great iron resources of the vicinity of Duluth, Minnesota, and became largely interested in various iron companies in both the west and the east. He was also associated with several important corporations of New York City, such as the Metropolitan Trust Company, and his eminent business abilities were widely recognized.

But Mr Bishop's activities were not confined to mercantile and financial affairs. He was a man of broad public spirit and benevolent aim, and the museums, hospitals, and churches of New York soon became objects of his intelligent and practical interest. His most noted gifts were to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, but he gave also to the American Museum of Natural History, in 1879, a large collection of Alaskan antiquities, and from 1880 to 1883, specimens illustrating the ethnology of British Columbia collected with the coöperation of the late Major J. W. Powell. Among the principal specimens in the latter collection is the great Haida canoe, which measures 64 feet in length and 8 feet in width, being hollowed from a section of a single tree by the Bella Bella tribe of Indians, opposite Queen Charlotte islands.

Mr Bishop possessed and displayed a remarkable appreciation of art in its many forms. On his frequent visits to Europe he found opportunity for acquiring a knowledge of the highest art productions, and he purchased liberally for the adornment of his home with objects of taste and elegance. In this country, too, he manifested the same enthusiasm; he was a constant attendant at art sales and exhibitions, and for over thirty years was known as an extensive collector. As Dr S. W. Bushell, the eminent foreign connoisseur, well said, he was known from St Petersburg to Peking. Mr Bishop's collection of Japanese lacquers, bronzes, and swords was especially noted. At a time when such materials were more readily obtainable than at present, he turned his attention to Oriental textiles and robes, gathering, among other objects of Asiatic art, extensive and remarkable collections of the gorgeous fabrics worn by Chinese nobles and Japanese daimios.

But Mr Bishop's last and most notable specialty was his collection of jades. This began with his purchase of the Hurd vase — one of the finest objects in jade that ever left China — from Tiffany & Company, in 1878. He thus became interested in this peculiar material, with its variety of tints and the endless forms into which it was wrought by Asiatic peoples ; and the result of this interest is the finest collection of jade that exists anywhere in the world. It has been gathered from many lands, and from the sales of many other collections, and contains over a thousand specimens, ancient and modern, in the natural state, or carved, engraved, and jeweled.

Mr Bishop was ever on the alert for choice specimens with which to enrich his jade collection ; he would follow the wanderings of a single piece for years, until the opportunity came for its purchase. In this way he obtained the best examples from many important collections, including the celebrated Welles collection exhibited some years ago at the South Kensington Museum. Among the noted pieces now in the Bishop collection are the emerald-green vase from the Brayton Ives collection, and the cylindrical green vase from the Hurd collection, above mentioned. This vase was obtained in China by Mr Hurd, who was a Boston tea merchant, it having formed part of the loot obtained by the armies of the Anglo-French expedition in 1860, when the forty buildings that comprised the Yuan-Ming-Yuan, or world-famed Summer Palace of Peking, were sacked and the imperial contents — the triumphs of the lapidarian art of centuries — were dispersed to the collections of the world through official, military, and commercial media. No finer example of jade ware existed among all this loot. It is elaborately carved in lantern shape, with foliage and garden scenes, and when a candle is placed within it, the design, with its varying shades of green, is emphasized with exceeding beauty. The collection is also rich in examples of the rare and beautiful "lettuce green" jades, which are highly prized and costly. All the many varieties of tint, and all the types and styles of workmanship in this mineral, which has been almost venerated by the Chinese and other Asiatic nations for centuries, are represented. The collection contains also a series of wonderful jewel-jades from East India, inlaid with large and valuable rubies, emeralds, and diamonds, as well as the famous Kligowski jewel-jades.

Nor is it only the artistic and historical fields that this unique collection illustrates, for the scientific side, both in archeology and mineralogy, is likewise fully represented. The former class comprises typical examples from Mexico, Central America, the north-west coast of America, the Swiss lake-dwellings, France, Italy, New Zealand, and elsewhere; the latter includes specimens with original labels of Damour, and what is perhaps the only known crystal of jadeite, besides a single mass of nephrite weighing 4,715 pounds, found by the present writer in *situ*, at Jordansmühl, Silesia, in 1899, and forming the largest piece of nephrite ever found on the European continent — indeed it is greater in weight than all the nephrite objects ever found in Europe.

The collection thus formed grew in the course of time until it came to be recognized as the most complete assemblage of jade objects in the world, exceeding even the fine collection in the British Museum. Mr Bishop finally began to feel that the collection was too important and valuable to remain in private hands, but that it should be accessible to the public in a fireproof building. He therefore commenced preparations for presenting it to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, of which he had for years been a trustee and patron. As an important part of this princely gift to the public and to science, he undertook the preparation of an exhaustive catalogue of the collection, illustrating its artistic, archeological, and geological aspects, which he desired to publish, without regard to expense, in a sumptuous volume limited to one hundred copies. The preparation of the scientific articles and the scientific investigation for the catalogue were assigned entirely to the writer, who was so fortunate as to enlist the coöperation of a dozen men eminent in related fields of research on both sides of the Atlantic; consequently a more thorough investigation of jade has been made in this work than perhaps was ever undertaken in connection with any other mineral. The specific gravity, the tensile strength, the compression test, the sonorousness of the mineral from a musical point of view, a chemical investigation, a macroscopical study, a microscopical examination of thin sections, the origin of the mineral, the mining, the archeological history, the cutting, drilling, polishing, and many other phases, have been studied with the utmost thoroughness, and where a specialist would be

found who more fully understood any special branch of the subject, his services were obtained to perform that part of the work.

Color experts were engaged for the drawings, engravings, and historical data; Chinese and Japanese artists were employed in illustrating it, and Mr Bishop himself supervised their work, which is of the highest quality. Many of the reproductions in color are by Prang, whose work on kindred subjects is so well known.

This unique catalogue was completed a short time ago, and is now about to pass through the press. Illustrations are given of all the more important objects of jade, including those finest in color or in etching. The catalogue presents the dates and gives details of style with historical particulars; it thus furnishes an important contribution to our knowledge of Oriental art, and will rank among the most authoritative and costly catalogues of the kind known, each copy representing an expenditure of about one thousand dollars. The work will be distributed only by presentation to important institutions having facilities for utilizing it, and to the crowned heads and other great rulers of the world. Not a single copy will be given to any private person not a member of Mr Bishop's family, nor will any copy be sold.

A circumstance which illustrates Mr Bishop's rare judgment and skill in selection, is the fact that in the minute scientific investigation to which the specimens were subjected, less than one per cent were discarded as not being true jades; and these, strange to say, were pieces that had a reputation for purity or rarity of color, or some other property which the Chinese peculiarly value in jades, and in which they had themselves been misled.

In May, 1902, when Mr Bishop formally announced his gift of the collection to the Metropolitan Museum, he expressed the wish that the magnificent cases now containing the jades should form a part of the collection, and that the room in which they were to be exhibited should be a reproduction of his own ballroom where he had kept the collection. This magnificent apartment has been pronounced by some of the greatest foreign architects to be the finest Louis XV. room that may be seen anywhere, excepting possibly those at Versailles and Potsdam. These wishes were acceded to, and Mr Bishop went to Paris to supervise the reproduction of this

ballroom, making a gift of \$55,000 to the Museum to cover the cost of finishing the room and of installing the collection in accordance with his desire. The Louis XV. cases referred to are constructed of the finest quality of gilt bronze and plate glass, and are a production of the house of Allard & Company of Paris. The spacious room in a northeastern corner of the Museum which has been prepared for the collection is to be known as Bishop Hall. A year will probably elapse before the collection can be made ready for the public view. In order to insure the consummation of his plans regarding the collection and the publication of the great catalogue, Mr Bishop has bequeathed \$50,000, in addition to his other gifts.

Although he had presented no special collection to the Metropolitan Museum except that of the jades, Mr Bishop contributed largely in other ways to the support of that institution. He did more than any one else toward the success of the project to save in its entirety and to present to the Museum the collection of swords made by Mr Brayton Ives, and which were sold when the latter ceased collecting. Through the coöperation of Mr Bishop, the late W. T. Walters, the American Art Association, and a few others, this collection, valued at \$15,000, was contributed to the Museum.

Of special importance was Mr Bishop's collection of Japanese iron-work, many of the examples being quite old. Among the specimens in this collection is a dragon nine feet in length, as flexible as a living reptile; and by way of contrast, a skeleton of a man, no larger than the little finger, yet containing a representation of every bone in the body and every joint, uncannily mobile. The lobsters, fish, and other objects of the same material make a collection that stands unrivaled in the United States. There is also a great display of *cloisonné* enamels; a large collection of carved ivories, many of them old and wrought with that artistic intricacy of detail attained only by the Orientals; an extensive series of lacquers and carved woods, of porcelains and Chinese coins; and lastly, a collection of hard stones other than jade. If this collection could be procured in its entirety for the Metropolitan Museum of Art, either by purchase or by donation, this would become one of the greatest museums for Orientalia in the country. With these,

and the Morgan-Garland porcelains and the Bishop jades in New York ; the Morse Japanese pottery and the S. W. Bigelow collection of Chinese and Japanese art objects in Boston ; the great Henry Walters collection of Oriental art in Baltimore ; the Detroit collection, and the fine display in the National Museum at Washington, the art of Japan and China can be studied better in America than anywhere else in the world.

It is rarely the case that one whose financial and social duties are so numerous as were those of Mr Bishop devotes so much time and achieves such notable success in connection with a single object of the kind herein mentioned. To Mr Bishop science and art owe the formation of a great collection ; the preparation of a scientific, artistic, and literary description of it ; the publication of a volume of such richness of illustration as to stand unparalleled ; and, finally, the presentation of the collection and its installation in a specially prepared hall in a leading museum.

