CLIO HINTON BRACKEN, WOMAN SCULPTOR AND SYMBOLIST OF THE NEW ART. BY MARY ANNABLE FANTON

SOME one has defined genius as the power of expressing in art by instinct what one has not experienced, of symbolizing what one has apprehended through the imagination without feeling, of gathering up by some mysterious insight the universal harmonious poetry of life into some one art. The creative impulse follows this insight, and training opens doors for it to pass easily through, out to the mass of people.

"There are not a dozen women geniuses living in the world at present," was the statement with which a very great artist astonished a group of people at a recent art exhibition.

"Not half of these are Americans," he added, "and one woman who undoubtedly has genius with a wonderfully various power of expression, Mrs. Clio Bracken, is still comparatively little known. She has worked quietly and with the serious dignity that sometimes wins recognition, but never pleads for it."

And it should be a matter of no small importance to the cynic about American art that one woman, still under thirty, should have manifested a genius that seems to be equally strong and convincing whether expressed in decorative or industrial art; that is on one hand full of the most exquisitely universal, purely poetical feeling, and on the other capable of adapting the most genuine art sense to the most practical detail of industrial improvement.

Mrs. Bracken's first work, when she was still in her teens and studying in New York with St. Gaudens, was a series of portraits in bas reliefs and busts, that proved at the start a rare instinct for the expression of temperament in portrait work as well as a marvelous power of combining with temperament a suggestion of the poetry of nature.

There has never been a more convincing portrait of Paderewski than the bas relief Mrs. Bracken did at eighteen. It will always be a good portrait of the man, for the fundamental quality of his character is there.

In Paris, later, where she studied with MacMonnies, Rodin and Loury, the real versatility of her genius first became apparent, and
she began there her modeling of nude figures in the small that have since brought her the recognition already quoted. Not only are the figures themselves most exquisitely and poetically drawn, but they are invariably symbolic of some thrilling emotion of life, some ecstasy of joy or sorrow, to which she adds a further symbolism of the gladness or pathos of nature.

In her unusual compositions in miniature almost every figure is expressed with its complement of grace or beauty, pathos or mirth of nature. She has apprehended and employed every charm of outdoors, of woods and wave to intensify the emotional beauty she wishes to express in the miniature figures in gold, bronze and silver, which in Paris are classified as objets d’art. There is an infinite variety of beauty in even the tiniest figures, and all are full of the meaning that is in the stars and the waves and the purple hill tops.

As an example of the natural pagan joy of life there is a tiny dancing girl, a slender figure in an ecstasy of graceful motion, all her delicate gold draperies blowing close to the young body as if she were the spirit of a tropical gale, alluring yet destructive. And in another study the crest of a wave half hides in its foam a tiny fairy, or is it a mermaid that seems so a part of the sea?—a lovely decorative effect, in which the figure is so completely in harmony with the rhythm and color and depth of the ocean that it seems a symbol rather than a study from life.

Purely decorative also is the slight figure of a young girl looking down, but with the left hand raised and pointing straight ahead, as though indicating something in life that she would fear to glance at. And is the artist symbolizing the tragedy of unreserved love in the miniature group called “The Worship of Pan”? A bust of the laughing young god Pan, and at the foot of the pedestal a beautiful, slender girl kneeling imploringly.

Although these objets d’art show most exquisite and poetical imagination, the imagination that harmonizes all beauty; that associates the curves of a body with the curves of a flower, the sweep or droop of drapery with wind and wave, that makes perfume and color and flesh all the varying expression of one idea, that shows the complete harmony there is in every quality of beauty; some of them at least suggest her interest in industrial art, in which ideal decoration is adjusted to a mechanical convenience.
CLIO HINTON BRACKEN

And Mrs. Bracken is most decidedly one of the frontiersmen in the feeling new in America that all interior decoration should be good art. She proves the courage of her belief in her own house, where every mechanical detail is decoratively beautiful, from door handles to electric bulb holders, and from desk ornaments to fittings of her dining room. She contends, as do all the new school of industrial artists, that all architects, interior decorators, furniture makers and bric-a-brac dealers should be trained artists, and she proves the truth of her ideal in her home and studio.

Up to now Mrs. Bracken’s genius has found no stronger revelation than in the punch bowl which she is decorating with scenes from Omar Khayyam’s “Rubaiyat,” and which was begun several years ago in Paris.

The final model for this bowl, which is to be reproduced eventually in marble, has been enlarged for a fountain; surely a bowl after Omar’s heart, with all the outer space and the wide curving rim carved with dancing, drinking, loving figures, and roses by the hundred drifting down over the merrymakers. It is not a drunken revel, not a crazed debauch of the senses, but an ecstatic tale of the joy of life that Mrs. Bracken has pictured around the rim; the gladness that youth finds in sunshine and color and perfume and purple fruit and love. It is a spring morning to lovers, twilight in the woods, it is bird calls and rose scents and Tyrian purple.

And the story is all told by beauty of face and body, by the delicate abandon of pose, by the outstretch of hand, the curve of dancing feet, by the fire of the eye and the quiver of the mouth. It is all symbolic, just as the “Rubaiyat” is symbolic, the intoxication of life, not of wine. To have missed this important significance would have left the work clever but not great.

At the base of the bowl it is Omar the cynic, Omar the melancholy, that is delineated. And the lovely bodies of women droop toward the earth. The hair sweeps downward, the glasses are turned down, the roses are tumbling to the ground, and on the faces of both men and women in the lower groups are the lines of memory, mournful and pathetic. It is not pessimism, it is life, that has been full of joy and vivid with ecstasy, and that now sees things clearly, perhaps sadly, but never forgetting the beauty and never regretting the joy. It is
THE "OMAR" PUNCH-BOWL, MRS. BRACKEN'S MOST FAMOUS BRONZE
STANDING FIGURE IN BRONZE
MRS. CLIO HINTON BRACKEN, AT WORK UPON A PORTRAIT BUST OF MRS. ERNEST THOMPSON-SETON
"THE WORSHIP OF PAN"
LOTUS ASH TRAY

END OF BOOK RACK IN BRONZE
the harmonious composition in Mrs. Bracken’s work and the deep insight into the “Rubaiyat” that have made her place the sadder folk at the base of the bowl, and that have brought up to the brim, stretching over it, with an abandon of delight, all that is light-hearted and gay and beautiful and free from care.

Not only one’s first glimpse of the fountain is that of joy, but for the first few minutes one has only the sense of gayety, of supreme beauty and gladness. Then slowly, as in life, one realizes the sorrow under all the joy, the pathos back of revelry, if one but sees down to the root of things.

It is a study of the Rubaiyat, as that great poem portrays life, and the work of a mighty imagination, of vast insight without experience, and so, of genius.

And the worker is less than thirty, with a face of great beauty and a heart full of youthful enthusiasm for life. In her character there is the simplicity of true genius. And her children are dearer to her than her art.

THE RIVER

“*There is a river the streams whereof shall make glad the city of our God*” (Holy Writ)

Glad river of love, whose streams divinely fed,  
Countless and free, unresting on their way  
From hills of God, have down the ages led  
The soul of man, nor ever led astray.  
The cloud-born mists back to their ocean flow,  
Impulse divine, in fellowship with clod,  
Upbuilding in the thirsting vales below  
Glad, wayside, haven-cities of our God.

J. H. J.