

“Abe Hanson, Sculptor”

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here be stranger things in this world than the bed-fellows which politics makes, or even freaks of nature. Stranger than the phenomena of matter are the riddles of mind. Men are born into the world like beautiful patterns blurred, their symmetry and wholeness destroyed by nature's seeming carelessness or, to be broader, apparent loss of cunning. And yet the surgeon's knife has laid bare the error of nature and men can point to her uncompleted and ill-done work, telling what is lacking or what has been done without skill.

“But no chart or map of the mind has yet been made by which to square and measure human genius. The effect, the result is there, but not the cause. Only in a blind, confusing way can men point to some great gift, some inexplicable endowment, which has set its fortunate possessor many milestones in the lead of other men and has arbitrarily given powers which lifetimes of study can acquire.

“Who can explain how an unlettered colored boy can with his hands, unaided save by a simple knife or pointed stick, carve from stone images of marvelous trueness to life, or fashion from clay forms of life whose accuracy is not merely mechanical, whose finish of execution and tastefulness of design betoken the true artist? Strange place to look for aught that tells of higher things than common existence – in the breast of this rude, unlettered lad, who goes by the name of Abe Hanson, of Kansas City.

“Attention to Hanson's extraordinary gifts was first called in an article in the *Kansas City Journal*. In a person who had the benefit of long training and instruction, such work as Hanson does might not be considered remarkable, but it is extraordinary in the case of one who has had no instructor but himself, no training but his unaided striving after excellence, no model or pattern but the image within himself, the creation of an artistic imagination.

“To the voice that bids him strive he lends an eager ear and follows, as best the light already given allows him, the lead of the dim, unshaped ideal that beckons him onward.

“Unlike many gifted beyond their sphere or station, Hanson does not waste his talents or allow them to lie in disuse. He is ever striving to do better and longs for assistance to elevate himself and to develop his unusual powers.

“‘If I could only get somebody to help me, to send me away where I can learn more,’ is his constant aspiration, and it is one which furnishes an excellent opportunity for the exercise of some very effective philanthropy.

“Hanson is nearly twenty-four years of age. He was born in Leavenworth, Kan., and lived there till about eight years ago. When he was a small boy his mother died and he has supported himself by odd jobs, never learning any trade. He has three brothers and two sisters, all older than himself and all away from home, being scattered through the East and South. His father is an old soldier and is at present an inmate of the Soldiers' Home at Leavenworth.



“About eight years ago Hanson came to Kansas City, and has since lived here, working at odd jobs in a number of places. He was last employed at the Blossom House. During all this time he has used all his spare time in carving and fashioning in clay the forms of human beings and animals. His imagination, however, is not confined to these subjects alone, as he also executes many allegorical figures with rare taste and skill.

His favorite subject is the dog, and as a natural consequence his carvings and modelings of this animal are his best pieces of work. He prefers to fashion in clay, for the chief reason that it is quicker and a mistake can be easily rectified, whereas, carving from stone, a single mistake would spoil the result of long and laborious effort.

“After his design has been modeled out he fires the image in an oven whenever he can find anyone possessing one sufficient to do the work and with sufficient sympathy to allow him the privilege of using the oven. His best pieces are gilded, and many of them cannot be told from china and plaster-of-Paris images.

“Hanson’s methods are as simple as it is possible to conceive. His only instruments are a basin of water in which is a lump of clay of the consistency adapted to molding, and a stick flattened at one end. With these rude and unpromising implements he works out in the plastic clay the image that is in his soul. He says he sees the image in the clay or stone and simply cuts away the wrappings that hide it from the outer view.

“This is the soul of art, and if the workmanship is not perfect, if the untaught hand wanders and makes miss-strokes, if the image carved and fashioned does not conform exactly to that of which it is intended to be a counterpart, it is because the gift is only halved and because to the power to design has not been added the complementing ability to execute.

“Hanson first became aware of his unnatural gift when a child. He always had a ‘knack’ in fashioning forms in clay, and his favorite pastime was to indulge his inborn taste. His ability to carve is an addition of later years. In this branch of his art his sole and invariable tool is an old knife. Out of a peculiar species of soft stone he carves forms which are nearly more perfect than his work in clay, for the reason that he is compelled to proceed with greater care.

“Among his pieces displayed are a carved alligator, which is a very creditable piece of workmanship, and a carved dog, which is even better. A modeled dog is wonderfully true to life, and a recumbent child in clay, begun and finished in a day, is the best he has yet done. His subjects, of course, do not embrace a wide range, and none of them are fanciful. Birds and angels are mingled with his favorites, dogs, horses and sheep. In the windows where he has been working for several days past are displayed a number of his best pieces. Prominent is the bust of Maj. Warner. As might be expected, however, his attempts at portraiture are the least successful, for the first reason that it is the most difficult sort of work, and for the second and purely ethical reason that his models are abstractions, subjective and not objective. He sees the dog, or sheep, or what not in his mind’s eye, and when he attempts to portray a certain and particular dog or sheet or horse, he descends to copying instead of working out his mental pattern.

“It has been suggested that a number of philanthropic gentlemen make up a purse and send Hanson East where he can develop (sic) his talents, as he so earnestly and eagerly desires to do. It is possible that something may come of this after the world’s fair, for exhibition at which Hanson will soon begin an elaborate design suggested by Mrs. Patti Moore, and entitled, “The Lady of the Lake.” The design will be that of a lady standing in a boat holding a paddle in one hand and a hunter’s horn in the other.

“Hanson is modest and gentlemanly, ever seeking to learn and very grateful for suggestions which will help him in his work. His is a case of great interest, and his posers capable of great possibilities.”