An Hawaiian hiatus that led to love for lotus-land

By Elizabeth Ann McMurray

EDITOR'S NOTE—Miss Elizabeth Ann McMurray, who contributed this article to The Sooner Magazine, is the daughter of Marie Hunter, '21 music, and Jack McMurray, '21. She is the first of the second generation of Sooners to send us a contribution. Though she is only fifteen years old and a junior in McAlester high-school, she has been selling feature articles for the past year to the Tulsa World, the Tulsa Tribune and the Daily Oklahoman. She takes an active part in editing the publications of her school and plans when she graduates to attend the school of journalism of the university.

Artists of such varying tempers as Robert Louis Stevenson and Gauguin long ago were subjected to the spell of Hawaii and built themselves kingdoms of their own and lived out their lives in the sunshine and beauty of the islands. Their successors have been legion and the glories of the tropics have been chanted in many tongues but the praise given by three Oklahoma girls, all graduates of the state university, are not the least in enthusiasm and in interest to our state.

Maurine Watson, '21 arts-sc., who went soon after graduation, to the island of Maui to teach in an American school, was the pioneer of the group. In 1926 she returned to the states for a visit and when she went back to Hawaii she took with her her sister, Helen, '26 arts-sc., to teach. In 1927 they were joined by Helen Frances Shannon, '25 arts-sc. They now form a trio who love the states but prefer to live in Hawaii. Let's let them tell you the reason why.

"You cannot understand Hawaii without knowing her songs" says Maurine Watson. "There is one especially that explains our feeling. It goes:

West of the sunset stands my house

There—and east of the dawn;

North to the Arctic runs my yard;

South to the pole, my lawn.

Seven seas are to sail my ships;

To the end of the earth beyond,

Drifter's gold is for me to spend

For I am a Vagabond.

Fabulous cities are mine to loot,

Queens of the earth to wed;

Fruits of the world are mine to eat,

The couch of kings, my bed.

All that I see is mine to keep,

Foolish the fancy seems—

But I am rich in the wealth of sight,

The coin of the Realm of Dreams.

"That, you see, is the spell of Hawaii. Once there money does not trouble not matter. Hawaii in all its splendor is yours. The night is the land of the moon, by day the land of the glorious tropical sun. Choose your climate a romantic mountain retreat, a house on a dry plateau, a bungalow on a rainy shore or a Japanese villa at Waikiki."

Helen Watson sees the island as a land of sport and loves it for the variety of outdoor diversions that it offers. "Any sport which may be your favorite you are sure to find on our island. If you want to be modern you may go surfing-riding at Waikiki, play polo, tennis, or golf at some lovely country club, eat and dance at the Royal Hawaiian hotel and then go for a moonlight swim or boat ride and listen to the songs of the natives while the mellow moon shines above.

"But if you chose the old," and Miss Helen smiles so that we may guess her preference, "you may go to a luau and native Hawaiian feast where you eat poi and meat cooked in an 'imu' or oven in the ground. Again a song tells the story best:

One finger, two finger, three finger poi,

Go to a luau and eat with joy.

Eat it with laulau and eat it with inu;

Eat it with hunks of roast pig from the inu;

Eat it with breadfruit and big sweet potatoes;

Eat it with salmon fixed up with tomatoes;

Eat it with chicken, its better with mullet Which tickles your palate and pleases your gullet.

Don't use a fork.

Wiggle your finger.

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Don't use a fork.

Wiggle your finger.

Deep in the poi bowl

Lift it, don't finger.

Give it a flip in the proper direction,

It gets in your eye if you don't make connection.

This intricacies of the social life of the island appeal to Miss Shannon and her expression is happy as she recalls the pleasant times she has enjoyed there. "In the first place there are so many different sets in Honolulu," she says. "All the army people go together. And the navy, and college people all go in separate groups also. Of course the early settlers and the missionaries have their social sets and apart from all these are the natives.

"The amusements are practically the same as yours over here. A Honolulu theater installed a Vitaphone last winter. There's dancing and swimming, all sorts of winter sports and of course the usual indoor card games. You never have time to waste. The public library is a handsome building and we have access to all the latest books.

"Yes, everyone notices that inhabitants of the island are proud of their beautiful homes and strive to make them even more attractive to tourists. Some years ago the women of the Outdoor circle in Honolulu became aroused by the increase of the advertising billboards which ruined the lovely views and notified the merchants that they would purchase no goods advertised on billboards. Now there is not a single billboard on the island of Oahu, and in their staid ar thousands of oleanders, shower trees, poincianas and coconuts which are gorgeous in bloom."

When questioned about their work the Misses Watson explained many interesting things. "There are many races in our school," began Miss Maurine. "The Japanese, Chinese, Hawaiian, Portuguese, Filipino, white and mixtures of all these races.

"But it must be remembered that all these people are American citizens, just as proud and patriotic citizens as you or I. In my English classes I find that the Japanese and Chinese are the quickest to learn, although all my pupils are very intent upon learning and becoming like their brothers and sisters across the Pacific."

"The orientals are very curious, you know," added Maurine's sister, Helen. "They are continually asking questions about things over in America. They all speak pidgin English which may be a mixture of English and any

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Joseph Benton describes his operatic adventures

May, 1926. I had been in Italy but a short time and did not have a complete grasp of that country’s intricate but beautiful language. Mussolini talked from a balcony overlooking the fine Piazza del Duomo in Milan, and when he appeared on the balcony, the 125,000 persons standing below in the square, immediately put down their umbrellas and stood there in the pouring rain all during the discourse of “Il Duce” (The Leader). Mussolini has a compelling voice of the most ample resonation. His personality radiates through that eloquent voice and his presence is so gripping that he overawes you as soon as he appears. He has much of what made Napoleon famous (whatever that is) and this “it” has enabled him to reorganize Italy from the chaotic country flooded with Russian Bolsheviki which it was just after the close of the war, to the steady, well-disciplined, hard-at-work nation which Italy now is. Mussolini has his faults like all the rest of us who are possessed of human nature, but he is a great man, a great organizer and a man who has benefited his nation and us all. Indeed, were it not for Mussolini and his nation would not otherwise be allowed to stay. But Fascism is so well-grounded in the minds of the Italians, and Mussolini’s great military machine is so well-organized throughout its many branches and through the party’s leaders, that should Mussolini be stabbed tomorrow, the ideals that were founded by him and which have made a New Italy, would go on and on and Rome would still be mistress of the land of the Caesars.

It may be called destiny, fate, or whatever you wish, but I personally have been very, very fortunate in my experiences and advancement in Europe. I have sung all over France, North Africa, Switzerland, in Germany, Austria, Belgium and in all the leading cities of Italy. Indeed, during the past ten months, it has been my good fortune to have sung one hundred and twenty-six performances of thirteen operas in Italy, appearing in the cities of Venice, Genoa, Bologna, Como, Parma, Bergamo, Modena, Mantova, Padova, Treviso, Molinella, Lodi, San Remo, Rome, Tivoli, Mirabello, Rovigo, Ceseneli, Faenza and Verona. For the coming year, my Milan agent, Emilio Ferone, (who, incidentally, is the foremost and largest opera agent in existence) has me booked up solidly in the largest theaters of Italy.

A few of my numerous interesting experiences have been when I sang for the king and queen of Italy, the opera being La Bohème. An engraved card bearing the royal coat-of-arms with thanks penned by the queen, came to my dressing room after the performance. Another time I had to give a “commandeered” concert in the home of Hon. DeBono, then governor of Tripolitania; he was one of the original founders of the Fascist party and today is Mussolini’s “right hand man.” Last summer I sang during July and August in the Roman Arena of Verona in a season in which all of the singers save myself were from either La Scala or the Metropolitan, or both. The other two tenors singing in this season were Gigli in Marta, Lazaro in Isabeau. I sang in Faust (the title-role). The last week of August just passed, I sang on two concerts as soloist with the Royal Belgian Philharmonic orchestra in Ostend, Belgium. The only other vocalists to be so honored were all world celebrities: the bass Chaliapin, the greatest of all baritones, Titta Ruffo, the soprano Toti dal Monte and the baritone Franceschi of La Scala. This is one of the finest orchestras in all of Europe.

We may have learned to subdue our human nature and all that it contains, in one way or in another; yet the fact ever remains that we are all human under the skin. And the man who wins is the man who is trained and ready for the job he has undertaken. A college education may help some, or it may hinder others, in reaching the high plane where glitters the little white star to which we all would like to attain. But honest labor never spoils anyone’s conscience; only through its clean endeavor can any of us hope to attain success and the victory over our individual human nature.

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AN HAWAIIAN HIATUS THAT LED TO A LOVE FOR LOTUS-LAND

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other language they choose to put with it. We try to break them of the habit of course, but it is very difficult to keep from picking up bits of it for our own vocabulary.”

Since people over here wonder if all these races still wear the picturesque garments of other days, Maurine Watson explained about the clothing. On the streets one sees more American clothes than any other kind. Japanese women wear a costume consisting of a kimono and a sash, while the Chinese women are often seen in pants and silk jackets. The older Hawaiian women wear Mother Hubbards.

“There is an amusing story concerning their Mother Hubbards,” she says. “When the missionaries first came to the island they found the women wearing no clothes at all. The American women gave them their nightgowns as a first step toward civilization. The Hawaiian women made their first dresses and patterned them after the white women’s nightgowns!”

These descriptions of the island were given to me by our three emigrants this summer during their visit home and as if to prove by action what they had expressed in words they left soon after for their southern paradise. How long they will remain they cannot tell but as we of Oklahomans watch the dreams in their eyes when they turn westward we are convinced of the charms of the Hawaiian islands and are ourselves tempted to wander into the face of the sun and the land of “Aloha Oe!”