

THE SOCIAL NEED FOR ARTS AND CRAFTS IN EDUCATION.

THAT there is a social need for the arts and crafts in education is a foregone conclusion to one who works along decorative lines, especially in those forms of decoration which beautify the home. Since the first home was made in our country, whether an Indian tepee or a log hut, there has always been the desire to decorate the belongings of that abode in some manner. The endeavor to make that which is the dearest place on earth worthy of the name of home is one of the best traits of mankind. With the natural impulse in this direction, what could be a finer starting-point in the education of the individual than the occupations of the home? But what have we done, and what are the results?

We have been through two epochs in the development of the American home, and are now in a state of transition, which we believe will lead to better things.

1. After the hardships of pioneer life had passed, in the colonial days, our forefathers began furnishing comfortable homes, and there came across the sea many beautiful originals, which today we can study in old New England and in the South. Many of these pieces of furniture were the handwork of master-craftsmen in the Old World. Living was on a fine, simple plane, and the homes, in their classic lines, with the few treasures in old plate, furniture, and glass, had an air of refinement which charms to this day.

2. During the second epoch the original models were copied by cabinet-makers of the time, and gradual changes in form are noticed. As the demand increased, both quality and workmanship deteriorated, until we had a new furniture evolved, wholly American and not a trace of beauty in it. We opened the western forests, and black walnut became popular in furniture—a wood beautiful in itself, but so treated by color and mutilated in design that it was past recognition. From this we merged into the treat-

ment of oak, in antique and sixteenth-century finishes, worse in color and finish than all preceding it. By this steady output of bad things we are at last face to face with this fact that our homes have been furnished for us with the products from factories where honesty in construction and beauty of line had been sacrificed in the effort to make thousands of a salable type. We begin to see that, instead of the spirit of the home going forth and beautifying that which would return to the home, we have allowed the commercial thought to come in and form the objects of the home.

Many who desire better things have brought about a colonial revival. Have they gone back to the spirit of those days? or do they limit themselves to things colonial because they know that the old pieces in grandmother's garret were called *finie* by a connoisseur?

Others have hoped to avoid mistakes by following periods in decoration, but, in the general lack of knowledge and the difficulty in procuring true reproductions, Louis XV., Vernis Martin, Boulle, and straight-lined oak may be found in one room.

Another class, with money unlimited, have become collectors of everything: carved wells from Italy, mummies from Egypt, embroideries from Algiers, furniture from every land; and all mixed together in a house of composite architecture. What is the effect? Naturally one of confusion.

There is also the group of wholly modern spirits who, casting aside the past and its traditions, will have nothing that is not original, and by original they mean startling.

The commercial world, to meet these demands, has turned out by the thousands high-boys and low-boys, winged chairs and worktables, antique Italian marbles and Nouveau art creations. These have been well made or poorly made, according to the price. For those who demand colonial lines all must be in mahogany, until the inference abroad is that Americans use mahogany only in furniture.

The walls of our houses have been covered with pictures of all sizes, schools, and colors, until no space is left. If all of these were choice in subject or artistic in quality, there might be some excuse for this display. But walls crowded in this manner are

rarely the collections of those who know and love the individual bits. When our people know what are some of the qualities necessary to the making of a great painting or etching, we shall have pictures on our walls selected with finer taste. We may not be able to own the originals, but out of the hundreds of reproductions we shall know how to select those that are choice. In the majority of cases this covering of pictures has been over a wall so aggressive in pattern or strong in color that each vied to outdo the other. In such houses you will find ornaments in as great profusion as are the pictures on the walls. A few good pieces stray into the mass of insignificant objects. Thus, in our effort to decorate, our houses are filled with unrelated materials. We have this helpful thought from Charles Wagner:

Through a too common illusion, simplicity and beauty are considered as rivals. But simple is not synonymous with ugly, any more than sumptuous, stylish, and costly are synonymous with beautiful. . . . Wealth coupled with bad taste sometimes makes us regret that so much money is in circulation to provoke the creation of such a prodigality of horrors. . . . Rarely is it given us to contemplate in line, form, or color that simplicity allied to perfection which commands the eyes as evidence does the mind. We need to be rebaptized in the ideal purity of immortal beauty which puts its seal on the master-pieces; one shaft of its radiance is more than all our pompous exhibitions.

This overproduction of all things has had two effects: First, because of their cheapness, all could buy, and the general public accepted the things offered. If beauty of line or color or texture has never been brought to one; if honesty of construction has never been considered; if the right adaptation of form to material has passed unnoticed, what can be expected of both producer and purchaser? If better things are wanted by the masses—not necessarily more expensive, but something that will be fine and chaste in design—then the public must become appreciative of good things. The lack of appreciation has been most discouraging to the artisan, for ignorance has placed his products in competition with those of the machine. Discrimination does not come with money, but is acquired by association with beautiful objects and by close study of choice ones, whether furniture,

ornaments, pictures, or buildings. What we need for the people is some means of general culture along art lines. When the great uplifting influence of quiet, refined surroundings is felt, then the demand for beauty will find the artisan who can express in material a beautiful thought. This does not mean that all are to become designers or specialists, but only to know beauty when it is seen; to ask of the commercial world fabrics good in design and color, china simple in form and less decorated, furniture fine in lines, and papers for our walls that are backgrounds for pictures and not a support to the wall. If we ask these qualities of the producer, we shall find that, instead of turning out commonplace objects, there will be a design well considered before the machine does its part. Because of the cost in hand-made articles, only the few can possess them. But it is not necessary that the man and the machine shall be each a counterpart of the other.

We have worked so long in a mechanical way that the old-time craftsman who could express himself freely in his material has almost passed away. The mechanic has almost forgotten that art exists for him, and the artist does not affiliate with the mechanic. But here and there one has been found in our midst who lives for the work of his hands, who finds life has a broader outlook because of the beauty which he can create for others. When a discriminating public recognizes the difference in quality between the labor of the mechanic and that of the artisan, then there will be a truer estimate placed upon the ability and value of the artisan. One great social gain, if all could have hand-work as a part of their education, would be the development of mutual respect. The visible expression of an idea in solid form is a more convincing test of equality in ability than the written word. The quality of the creative thought and the directness of the expression through the material are both there to be seen. No more wholesome experience, morally and socially, could come to a large proportion of our people than actually to make something with their hands.

William Morris, with his enthusiasm for the many forms of crafts and his efforts to bring them to a practical issue, certainly has a lesson of value for us. Those brave spirits, who taught and

worked among their students for the spread of a better standard in the arts and crafts, have been pioneers in their line, but the leaven is beginning to work. Here and there groups of craftsmen are producing carefully wrought articles, and a market has been found for their things.

Our schools introduced manual training. At first it was merely a series of mechanical exercises, but within a few years a broader scope has been given to the work by its correlation with art and other studies. In the kindergarten came the natural expression in family needs for the hand-work; and if this passes on to the later work in education, we shall have by the combined efforts of our educators, in art and manual training, a public that will accept only those things which will be a credit to its city and its homes. Such training gives the individual a different basis from which to work and a more intelligent interest in the various occupations of life. With a sympathetic public, whose first consideration is not the commercial one, the profession of the artist or the trade of the artisan will be looked upon as a necessity and not as a luxury. Now that we begin to see wherein our life is incomplete, there is already one element of danger in our being too eager to take up the idea of decoration and lose the spirit of the movement, which is rather to simplify than to complicate conditions.

Home-making today is a more difficult problem in our country than it was fifty years ago. The home, with its ever-widening influence in the social and business world, gives the women of our land a field for labor which demands the best qualities of mind and heart trained in the finest manner. With such women actively interested, we shall have homes which are not furnished to follow a fad, but are the embodiment in every detail of a fine conception of life expressed in a harmonious manner.

Those who are in the commercial world look to those who are the educators to give to the young such broad training that they will look upon beauty of environment, whether in the tenement of the poor, in the public-school building, in city streets, in commercial products, or in their personal surroundings, as an essential part of right living.

One who is greatly interested in the spread of beauty says:

God hath appointed to them [our students] the task of diffusing the beautiful in American society. . . . Great is the influence of the merchants and the inventors and the editors. But who shall say that this new enthusiasm for the beautiful with which God has baptized American society is not to do quite as much for the influence of happiness and culture? . . . The distribution of the beautiful in daily life is an incitement toward beautiful thoughts and a beautiful character, and a barrier against ugliness of mind and deformity of morals.

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