

HIGHER STANDARDS THE NEED OF AMERICAN CRAFTS

BY RICHARD F. BACH

OF all types of activity receiving direct stimulation from the war, none has so well profited by the present isolation of America as the science of chemistry. Official reports for the year preceding last June offer satisfactory information as to the growth of the dyestuffs industry in America. Of aniline dyes, America *imported* in 1914 products to the value of \$7,241,406.00 and four years later *exported* similar products to the amount of \$7,296,080.00. There is a sermon in these figures. Four years have accomplished not only a complete neutralization of the former import figure, which may in this case be considered a negative figure on the thermometer of trade, but have in addition witnessed a positive gain above zero of an amount more than equivalent to the previous importations.

These coal tar dyes we formerly purchased from Germany. We now make essential colors sufficient for our own requirements and have begun to sell to other countries that have not so well profited by the opportunities of the war. In fact, latest reports show that our sales outside the United States are being made at a rate which would be represented by an annual figure of close to ten millions, and this does not account for the factor of acceleration.

For those interested in the industrial arts the initiative of the chemists offers pregnant suggestions. They have taken opportunity by the forelock, have assured American business in a very important field, have patriotically established America in a new branch of commerce, have assured to the American people a decided advantage in the way of American-made colors.

Can we say the same for American furniture, textiles, floor coverings,

and other industrial arts fields? Have they seen their opportunity or have they been careful to persuade themselves that business will be as usual after the war? Do industrial arts producers in these many fields fondly imagine that all of our friends the Allies will go out of business after the war? The same advantage which the chemists saw in America's isolation, our Allies have undoubtedly seen as a menace to their own commercial progress. There will be as many millions of mouths to feed in Europe, there will be as many artisans and workers capable of the highest type of tasteful execution as ever before; there will be put forth as a consequence the utmost efforts to reestablish European leadership in the industrial arts in the American market. The Allies saw three years of war before we entered the ranks; they had therefore three years' time in which to consider what to do when the war should end. As a consequence, it has ended more suddenly for us than for them, and the most terrific currents and cross-currents have begun to churn up the smooth course of our business life.

American manufacturers in the industrial arts fields must take advantage of their opportunity to improve their foothold in the markets of the world. American distributors must be convinced that the American public deserves the best; the American people must realize the plus quality of design in their own home furnishings. To this end the American schools must teach taste and appreciation rather than inane drawing without objective in execution. To this end schools of industrial art must be established. To this end we must make a beginning in training our own designers to provide for our own ends in our own way. To this end all of our manufacturers, designers, artisans, craftsmen, workmen, school children, and all who run and read, must find time to visit the museums, to take advantage of the enormous opportunities offered not only by the collections themselves but in the way of lectures, study rooms, photographs, publications, expert advice, and many other lines of direct educational usefulness. We have only to consider the work done by the Metropolitan Museum in this connection to be assured of the immediate purpose which actuates our great museums. When the arts of peace will be called upon to restore balance, when these arts begin to function once more as a lodestone of life, the work of the Metropolitan Museum will be rated high.

It is the high duty of craftsmen and women in the various arts of ancient lineage and of honorable history, in their effect upon the growth of civilization, to cherish constantly the ideal of absolute perfection of design and reliability of workmanship, and this duty, like the arts themselves, has changed progressively with each decade of time. In the year 1919 it has come to mean that handicraft in itself is not complete as an evidence of human progress in art. This handicraft must also exert its direct effect as a check upon machine manufacture, improving this by excellent example and by faithful practice. Nor should the craftsman wait for the manufacturer to come to him for suggestion; the obvious duty lies in the other direction. The craftsman in lace as in metal and other fields must convince the manufacturer, who must in all cases supply the mass requirements of the people generally, that only the best product in design and execution is good enough for America. The best workmanship and the best design will invariably remain in control of the handicraftsman, but unless he has demonstrated to the manufacturer engaged in mass production the guiding value of his craft as a standard he has performed but the tithe of his mission and his finest work must remain nothing more than a voice in the wilderness.

AMERICAN STANDARDS OF DECORATIVE ART

IF the home be ugly, the dwellers therein seek rest elsewhere, are not proud of their home, meet their friends outside it, lose interest in it—the morale is lowered. But if the home be beautiful yet comfortable, its utility not sacrificed to an unsound ornamental scheme: then will it beckon, welcome, satisfy, and radiate peace and joy. Art counts, though often unconsciously, in all the avenues of life—“a thing of beauty is a joy forever.” If it be true that 50,000 craftsmen have been sacrificed in the war, who is going to help maintain American standards of decorative art? Surely Europe cannot spare those of her artists and artisans who are left! Have we not, as a club with textile interests, some duty in this matter; and has not each club member an individual responsibility?

G. W.