AN ARTS AND CRAFTS EXHIBITION

THE Arts and Crafts Exhibition recently held at Springfield, Mass., calls for detailed comment. It was organized through the co-operation of the Board of Trade, the Teachers' Club, and the Architectural Club of that city. It was, in some measure, the result of a series of consultations of workers at various handicrafts in the Connecticut valley. These men and women have met from time to time under the leadership of Mr. John Cotton Dana, whose ultimate and cherished object is the establishment of a school of industrial arts in connection with the Springfield city library, and the union of the workers in a practical foundation, or society, which shall embrace the region round about. The exhibition, as the initial step of the movement, has been so successful that strong hopes are justified that the scheme may be realized in the near future.

The exhibits were not sent alone by the valley craftsmen already mentioned. They were drawn as well from more distant localities in the East, as also from the Middle and the Western States. The objects shown included tapestries and rugs, wood-carvings and furniture, artistic book-binding, pottery, photographs, metal-work, basketry, embroideries and laces.

Among the most interesting exhibits were those of textiles, especially of rugs produced by village industries. In these fabrics, the artistic results are remarkable, as proving the excellence which can be attained by practically unskilled labor, if only the work be guided by intelligence and aesthetic sense. Much enthusiasm was created by the rugs woven at Pequaket, N. H., under the direction of Mrs. Helen R. Albee, whose description of her own industry appeared in the March issue of "The Craftsman." Mrs. Albee's rugs are of that domestic variety known as "hooked:" a treatment of the material producing little projections and angles in
Living Room by The United Crafts
Hall by The United Crafts
the pile which catch the light, scatter it in glints, and spread over the surface of the fabric a velvety sheen. The texture is equaled by the design and the color. Fine effects are obtained by the massing of dull yellows, dark blues and rich olive tones, the latter such as were used by the English Pre-Raphaelite painters. The color scheme is in all cases aided, and not thwarted, by the pattern, and, as a whole, certain of the pieces are as good artistically as many Oriental rugs which command high prices.

An entire room of the exhibition was occupied by the Deerfield Arts and Crafts Society. Here were shown the “Blue and White” embroideries which perfectly reproduce the old domestic work of the same name; also, rugs or “rag carpets,” of which even the catalogue description is most attractive, by its suggestions of soft, or harmonious color effects: mottled green, blue and gray, brown and green, brown and orange. Textiles in vegetable fibres were also shown, including palm-leaf, raffia and reed basketry.

A typical Swedish industry proved very attractive to visitors. This was the work in tapestry of the Misses Glantzberg, whose loom was seen in operation, slowly producing a design which has been for generations an hereditary possession in the family of the weavers. Excellent workmanship, as well as artistic ability characterized this exhibit, and created a desire for further acquaintance with the work of a country in which the traditional handicrafts are maintained with scrupulous care. Articles of household furniture were shown by a number of exhibitors from Springfield, Boston and New York, and by the United Crafts; the latter sending a bride’s chest, a hall settle and a Morris chair.

Further, there were two small but beautiful displays of pottery: one—the Grueby—presenting a wide range of experiment in forms, and showing vases, tiles, and even an occasional bust; the other was the work of Mr. Volkmar of Corona, Long Island,
who, not unworthily, has been called a modern Palissy. Like the French potter of the sixteenth century, he is willing to do the finest things in clay, and he is so critical of his own work as to sacrifice every piece which does not please his better judgment. He works in the spirit of a Greek potter of the best period: caring nothing for ornament which is not essential to the design; but strenuously seeking harmony of line, grace of proportion, depth and suavity of tone. His productions are not for the moment, but rather seem destined to attain a permanent value and influence.

The art of book-binding was represented in the work of several craftsmen; notably in that of Miss Ellen Gates Starr, of Hull House, Chicago. This exhibitor presented two volumes bound with exquisite accuracy and taste. Through her work, Miss Starr is seen to be at once student and artist: thoroughly acquainted with the famous historic binders, yet progressive in ideas, advanced in methods, individual in touch, and never servilely imitative. Her work is distinguished by delicate designs in arabesque and by a perfection of tooling which rival those of the seventeenth century French bindings.

Another remarkable exhibit consisted of photographic studies by the Misses Allen of Deerfield, whose name and work are familiar to all readers of American illustrated magazines. These young women are the authors of many landscape and figure studies, which, purchased by summer visitors to Deerfield, have gone to distant points of the country and have created a steady demand for the work of the artists. Among their patrons is now numbered Mr. John La Farge who uses their studies in connection with many others, as material from which to develop ideas for his mural paintings. The Misses Allen have received numerous prizes and rewards. They have exhibited at the Washington salon, at which they won the blue ribbon and
special mention; at the Philadelphia Photographic Club rooms, by invitation, in a display of their own work exclusively, and recently, under the same conditions, at the New York Camera Club. They were represented at Springfield by some eighty studies, among which was a figure group of a mother and two children, most distinctive and beautiful, and quite reminiscent of the pictures of Jules Breton.

From this brief notice of the Springfield Exhibition an idea may be gained of its importance and significance for the development throughout our country of the lesser arts. The sincerity and strictness of the promoters of the enterprise can be judged by quotations from the foreword of their brochure:

"The jury made selections upon the basis of merit. Each object was judged first according to the recognized principles of constructive and decorative design, and second according to workmanship. . . . . Many objects were contributed which, from a technical point of view are worthy of high praise, but from an aesthetic point are open to criticism. The jury wished to encourage all sincere effort, and therefore has admitted some works which it can not approve from the standpoint of design."

The spirit and the standards here maintained with such insistence are a hopeful sign, and should be universally adopted in the home, as well as in the museum or the exhibition.

It is announced that a summer school of hand book-binding will be held in Syracuse, N. Y., by Miss Euphemia Hart, of the Evelyn Nordhoff bindery. The classes will begin about June 10, and the Cobden-Sanderson method will be exclusively taught. Letters may be addressed to Miss Hart, 327 West 56th Street, New York City.
THE value of a device is universally recognized. All strongly bonded associations jealously guard some visible sign which may keep the principles for which they stand ever before them; while, at the same time, the sign, by its mystery, serves to awaken the interest of those outside the body.

Obedient to this time-honored principle, the workmen of the United Crafts are constantly stimulated by the Flemish motto first used by Jan van Eyck, and later, in French translation, adopted by William Morris. The “If I can” is an incentive to the craftsman who seeks to advance the cause of art allied to labor.