SOME CORNISH CRAFTSMEN – BY
MABEL THORNTON WHITMORE

THERE is on the coast of Cornwall, England, a little fishing village which, in the past twenty years, has become celebrated because of resident artists whose work is known wherever pictures are seen and valued. But in the last decade there has grown up in that same little village, a flourishing industry about which very little is known outside the limits of the section influenced by it.

Newlyn by Penzance lies on the border of Mount’s Bay, about midway between Land’s End on one side, and the Lizard Lights on the other. It is a picturesque little place, crouching at the waterside under the brow of a steep hill, where the crooked streets threaten to shoot the pedestrians straight into the harbor, and where thatched roofs are still in fashion.

The bleak Cornish coast offers little in the way of encouragement to farmers, and the chief occupation of the men and the larger boys is fishing. The little harbor, artificially made by long piers built out into the bay, is crowded with the brown-sailed luggers, which at sunset stream out to the ocean, and in the early dawn steal back one by one, with their load of fish.

In the winter months, however, there are many nights when the boats cannot go out. Then, the men find their occupation ashore: mending nets, repairing sails, overhauling rigging and—most important of all, if judged by the faithfulness shown—“pacing the quarter deck,” to and fro on the bluff by the water-side, telling long tales of their varied experiences.

The younger lads from fourteen to eighteen, who belong to the crews, but take a minor part in the work on shore, thus have, during the long winter months, much idle time on their hands. And it was with a view of keeping them out of the “Pubs,” and
so out of mischief that, about 1892, some of the local artists organized "The Newlyn Industrial Class," devoted chiefly to metal work. The Member of Parliament for that district, who is a wealthy and generous man, became interested in the idea, and financially aided the enterprise.

A suitable room was rented, centrally located near the water (for your true fisherman never penetrates more than a few hundred yards inland), where the incessant din of the hammers would not seriously annoy the neighbors. A few simple tools were purchased: chasers, punches, dies for stamping backgrounds, and hammers and mallets, with a number of lead, or pitch tablets.

An instructor experienced in metal work was engaged from London, and the school was opened three evenings the week for all who wished to join, no fee being charged. The class became popular, and although a number of the pupils soon wearied of the work, their places were filled by others whose interest grew and whose ability for the work developed.

It must be understood that, at the outset, the artists were as ignorant of the craft of brass-beating as the fisher-lads themselves. But three or four of them became much interested in the work, originally from the point of view of a charity toward the boys, and afterward, because of the really good and interesting results obtained. The evening classes were at first directed by the instructor from London, and attended in turn by one or two of the artists. The latter quickly became conversant with the methods employed, and expert in the use of the tools. They made all the designs for the work. These were at the beginning very simple. They were given to the boys, who with carbon transfer paper, traced them on smooth sheets of copper or brass. Copper was found to be more ductile and easier to work, and these qualities, together with its deep, rich color, made it the favorite material. As soon as the artists themselves began
Suggestions for Dining Room by the United Crafts
to understand the use of the tools and the manipulation of the metal, the instructor was dismissed, and the work attempted assumed a somewhat different character. The work of the London teacher was precise, neat, highly finished, and conventional. The artists, on the contrary, aimed at something more individual, unconventional and distinctive. Their designs were kept simple and naturally reflected the surroundings of the place: the things with which the fisher-boys were familiar. Sea-weed and fishes, the quaintly shaped lugger, even the light-house pier with the tossing sea at its foot were outlined on the metal. The things first wrought were trays, simple plaques, finger-plates for the edges of doors, etc.

But in a short time there developed among the boys a number who showed real ability for the work. One in particular, somewhat older than the others, became expert, not only in the use of the tools, but also in adapting and even in originating simple designs. Later, this young man was employed, at a regular salary, to superintend the class, take care of the room, purchase materials, and teach beginners. The tri-weekly attendance of the artists (finally somewhat of a burden) then became unnecessary; but one or two, with Mr. John D. Mackenzie (whose beautiful black-and-white work is well known among illustrators), at their head, continued to make the designs, superintend the work, and direct the sale of the productions.

From making the small objects already mentioned, the boys progressed to varied and complicated articles. Candlesticks, sconces, inkstands, hoods and blowers for fire-places, corners and finger-plates for doors, brass and copper boxes, picture frames, large tea-trays and beautiful plaques were produced. The articles were at first bought cheaply in the neighborhood. But the market widened, and as the quality of workmanship improved, and the designs became more elaborate and beautiful, the work commanded higher prices, and
orders came from all directions. A depot for the sale of articles was established in several places, and a London agency instituted.

The boys, who, at the beginning, received their instructions and a small percentage on the sales, were given fifty and then seventy-five per cent. of the profits; the remainder going to the maintenance of the rooms and the salary of the caretaker and teacher. The more skilful workers began to earn substantial sums, and advancing from tracing the patterns, they were finally able, in many instances, to adapt and even to originate designs. The time occupied in learning this craft would otherwise have been wasted: stormy evenings when the boats lay at anchor, or day hours that could be spared from other labors.

In Newlyn, the influence of the artists upon the work was naturally very great; their designs being original and valuable. But good designs are now obtainable from many sources, and their transfer to the metal is work which even a child can do. Thus, given a little instruction in the use of the tools, the knowledge of the possibilities of the medium comes quickly, and the "union in one person of designer and workman" is more or less certain, when any facility or taste is developed.

The rough Cornish fisher-lads, with an education far inferior to that offered by our ordinary grammar schools, and with no inheritance of mechanical ability or dexterity, have, in a few years, established an industry which is already recognized in England, and which commands a good sale and fair profits. It is also an employment which they can pursue at odd hours, and which does not interfere with their regular calling of fishers. Therefore, in view of the success attending the work, and the employment and profit it offers to lads who glean but a scanty and precarious livelihood from the treacherous waters, the artists who devoted many pre-
ious hours, amid the deafening noise of the hammer, to
the starting and fostering of the enterprise, may well feel
repaid for their unselfish labors.

METAL AS A MEDIUM OF EXPRESSION
BY MARY NORTON

Wrought metal brings us to a field of work which
offers large opportunities to the craftsman. The
medium may seem at first unsympathetic and stubborn,
but, on the contrary, it is most responsive to those who
understand its nature.

Metal offers a wide choice of
temperament from which to select our favorites. For my
own part, I much prefer the pure metals to the alloys, as
with my somewhat limited experience, one element at a
time engages all my energies. Every metal should be
allowed to preserve its own individuality, and we should
seek to define its leading characteristics, while using it to
express our own ideas.

In planning work: for example,
an interior decoration, it is well to consider first, what
kind of metal can best be employed, with respect to both use
and ornament; second, which of several metals is preferable
in color and texture in relation to the other furnishings of
the room; third, but by no means least in importance,
what style of design is best suited to both the use and the
metal selected. If iron is chosen as filling all require-
ments, a design must be made, especially adapted to the
qualities of that metal. We can no more make a design
suited to iron, and work it out in copper, than we can
weave a pattern for gingham into a brocade, and expect