ONE of the most interesting exhibitions of arts and crafts was that held a few weeks ago by the Clarion Guild of Handicraft at Manchester. For it was not only a large collection of the finest examples of modern craftsmanship; it was much more than this, for the Clarion Guild is at once the outcome and the evidence of an important social development.

All who have eyes for the beautiful have for long looked with horror on the ordinary trade products of to-day, which have taken the place of the marvelous craftsmanship of what we term a ruder age. Badly designed and faultily constructed, they have but one merit—cheapness; a spurious merit, for we pay dearly for it in the end. More and more a demand has arisen of late years for well-designed and well-made articles, but more and more is it becoming evident that work of this nature can not be produced by modern industrial methods.

John Ruskin and William Morris were right. The gospel which both preached, and which Morris in his life put to practical test, is the true one. The old work was beautiful because it was the free and spontaneous expression of the individuality of the worker. He was a real craftsman, a man with a mind of his own, and with an outlook on life of his own, which found expression in his work. In many of the most vital things of life he was much more truly a free man than the modern workman. He did not turn out a piece of work in a certain hard and fast way, because “the firm” had contracted to supply at a certain price several hundred articles “as per pattern.” No, each piece of work stood by itself. Its treatment was a problem arising out of the exigencies of the material, the purpose for which it was intended and the fancy of the worker.

The craftsman must be a free agent once more, master of himself and his craft, before he can turn out work of the old individuality and power. Until the system of authorized anarchy, which goes by the names of individualism, free competition, and other euphemisms is finally vanquished, there can be no real return of the golden age of craftsmanship.

Meantime the spirit of revolt is alive, there is a striving after bet-
CLARION GUILD HANDICRAFT

ter things. There are a few craftsmen even now. Not in the large workshops of the cities are they to be found, but in quiet little villages, working singly, or combined in little groups, the better to fight the hydra-headed monster. And it will surprise no one to hear that these enthusiasts almost to a man are followers of John Ruskin and William Morris—men with their eyes fixed on something nobler and better than the present chaotic industrial and social system, and working steadfastly towards the realization of their ideal.

Of all these guilds of craftsmen, none has a more pronounced social basis than the Clarion Guild of Handicraft.

It had its origin four years ago in a suggestion by Mrs. Julia Dawson of the Clarion newspaper, the leading English socialist organ, and since then, under her able management, it has steadily grown in prosperity.

It is essentially a working-man’s guild. There are no high fees; there are no paid teachers. The more expert members, and the Guild includes many first rate craftsmen, place their services at the disposal of the less skilful, and the weekly subscriptions only amount to a few pence per member, to meet the cost of such necessary items as rent, light and heating. This no doubt sounds Utopian, but it works well in practice; a fine feeling of esprit de corps animates the different branches; and in addition to turning out good work, each branch forms a pleasant and stimulating social center.

Of all handicrafts that of the wood worker stands first in importance, not only because of its more general utility, but also because it forms the basis of so many other arts and crafts, and in fine woodwork the Clarion Exhibition at Manchester was especially rich.

One of the most striking exhibits was that of Mr. A. W. Simpson of Kendal, an unattached member, whose furniture was an example of all that is best in modern craftsmanship. One has only to look at the chair here reproduced to recognize how far it is removed from the ordinary trade article. The lines of the design are simple, the graceful ornamentation of the back obtaining full value from the severity of its surroundings, and most important of all, the chair is thoroughly fitted for its purpose. Sitting down, one finds that the arms have been shaped just in the manner that forms the most convenient support, so that from the point of view of utility as well as that of artistic fitness, it justifies its existence. Among other fine examples by the
Oak Chair by Wilmslow Guild

Oak Chair by A. W. Simpson, Kendal

Hanging Cabinet and Metal Work by Liverpool Guild
DOOR PLATE IN COPPER
LONDON GUILD

EMBOSS LEATHER WORK BY GERTRUDE E. WRIGHT
SCREEN IN COPPER AND EMBROIDERY BY LONDON GUILD

EMBROIDERED SCREEN BY LONDON GUILD
same craftsman was a dainty little writing cabinet, only some twelve inches in height, and full of the most exquisite workmanship. Particularly admirable was the treatment of the handle, which formed the central point of the decoration, and which consisted of two cunningly shaped hollows for the finger and thumb.

Most of the local guilds sent specimens of woodwork, and very excellent some of these were. Special mention must be made of two pieces by the Liverpool Guild, which in their simplicity of design and capable workmanship were quite in the old spirit. These were a hanging wall cabinet and a music stall in oak, with well wrought copper fittings. When one compares such a cabinet, for instance, with the usual flimsy machine-made article, with its false hinges of stamped copper, while a little hinge concealed inside really does the work, one sees that the virtues of sound craftsmanship are realities and worth paying for.

Another excellent piece of work was the chair shown by the Wilmslow Guild, which was both shapely and comfortable.

Many good specimens of wood-carving were shown, especially a series of panels from the Manchester Guild, and a carved table and chair from the Liverpool Guild.

In metal work the London Guild was particularly strong, showing a particularly fine alms-dish in beaten copper, a very original candle sconce in copper and iron, beakers and bowls in silver and copper and many other interesting examples, while the Liverpool Guild also showed some charmingly simple and graceful vessels, beaten up from the flat. The Wilmslow Guild also exhibited some good metal work. One especially interesting piece was a massive leaden rainwater head, which, with its good design and bold and simple ornamentation, converted to a thing of beauty an article which under modern treatment is usually as uncompromisingly ugly as it is undoubtedly useful.

Some of the jewelry exhibited was delightful in its effective simplicity. We are too apt to associate jewelry with the idea of costliness, and it is well that we should see how, in the hands of an artist, comparatively inexpensive materials can be made to yield results of great beauty. The exhibits of Miss M. Partridge, an unattached member, were particularly charming, and it was encouraging to note how their simple elegance was appreciated. In her work the beauty
of the material plays its full part. A flat slab of silver cut to a good shape, the surface smooth and untouched by the embossing or chasing tool, a piece of shell or pebble set in, and that is all. The result is simple, inexpensive, and artistic.

A section particularly attractive to ladies was that devoted to embroideries. In this field there seems to be a growing tendency to turn from the old minute work to the bolder and more striking effects which are obtained in appliqué, and which lend themselves so well to the decoration of portières or other large hangings. It is particularly pleasing to see the revival of this ancient art, which seems so particularly a woman’s art, and in which such delightful effects can be obtained. For in an embroidered curtain far more gorgeous effects of color may be obtained than on a painted canvas. Not only have the various silks and other materials used a sparkle and richness unobtainable in mere pigments, but the various stitches give a rich variety of texture. Most important of all the material not being stretched flat but hanging loosely, the effect is rendered still richer and more varied by the play of light and shade in its folds.

A particularly fine example was the linen work bag by Miss H. K. Chapel, of Arbroath, the colors being green and a delicate shade of blue.

Two fine screens were also shown by the London Guild, in one of which a panel of copper is inserted with good effect.

Space only remains to mention briefly one or two of the minor crafts of which beautiful examples were to be seen.

The bookbindings were exceedingly rich in style, and excellent examples were shown by the London, Liverpool, and Manchester Guilds.

The basket work of Mr. J. King of Saxmundham, another unattached member, showed well how articles of daily use, however humble, by good design and sound workmanship, may acquire a simple and unpretentious beauty.

Of illumination there were several charming examples, and numbers of fine decorative drawings and designs lined the walls.

Mention must also be made of the examples of embossed leather work by Miss Gertrude E. Wright, which were quaint and fanciful in design and full of wonderfully subtle modeling.
TWO CARVEN PANELS BY MANCHESTER GUILD
The writing of this book in colours and gold was finished by William Mellor on the 7th day of November 1904.

William Morris.