ALS IK KAN
THE OLD CRAFTS AND THE MODERN FACTORIES

It was just a little shop,—a basement, simple, unostentatious,—yet in it I found the atmosphere of another world. Beside the pleasant crackling of an open fire, made doubly inviting by the drizzling rain outside, the Oriental jeweler, a kindly, soft-voiced Persian, brought out the choicest samples of his workmanship for my inspection, glad to show his treasures to anyone who seemed at all appreciative of their art.

As I fingered the well-set stones, the delicate filigree work, rich with careful beauty of finely wrought design, I wondered at the infinite patience that could link such thoroughness with such perfect art. The beauty of line, the harmony of color, the cleverness of detail, the wonderful sense of craftsmanship that everything betrayed, aroused not only my admiration but my curiosity. To what was it due, this subtle quality that seemed to permeate each object? How was such excellence possible at such comparatively moderate price?

The man smiled a little as I questioned him, and then, seeing that my interest was not an idle one, he talked to me about his work.

In studiously chosen English, with quaint foreign accent, he spoke of the old Eastern customs and traditions that formed the historic background of his art. How, through the years and centuries, from father to son, from generation to generation, the same ideals of work had been handed down, the same designs transmitted, the same methods used, the same qualities of style and material retained, so that there was an inherited standard of excellence to achieve, a style that, though it might be slightly varied, could not very well be surpassed. And then, the intrinsic value of the things, he pointed out,—this in itself was one of the chief features. Here was a sixteenth century bracelet, there a pair of old, old earrings, and further on a necklace dating back a thousand and odd years,—a trifle aged and mellowed, perhaps, with time and earth and air, but yet as beautiful today as when they first saw the light of an Asiatic sun; beautiful with the beauty that knows no fashion, no change of style, and ready to be used and reused, adapted and readapted, to whatever new purpose their design would best serve. And behind the setting of those stones I glimpsed a whole philosophy.

The Persian picked up something more modern,—a dull silver pendant of his own. "My work," he said with genuine pride, "is good for now and a hundred years from now." And I wondered silently how many of our American manufacturers could say the same of theirs.

The point of view of this simple and sincere workman furnishes the most complete and interesting contrast to our modern system of business,—a contrast which makes understandable our failure to produce very very much of anything along the line of permanent beauty. This man's standard of excellence is the "oldest thing"; ours is the "newest thing." This man's background for his work is tradition; the modern workman demands no background. He is looking ahead for the thing called novelty. The Persian craftsman is one link in a long chain of progress and achievement. The modern workman has too much liberty to be linked to any system for progressive development. The object of the manufacturer today is to produce as many things as possible. The object of the Oriental craftsman was to produce only the few beautiful and valuable things. We oppose the phrase up-to-date against tradition. The more up-to-date a thing is the more ephemeral it must be. We have made impermanency a basis of commercial valuation, because if only the latest thing is the valuable thing, it ceases to be valuable the minute it is superseded by something later. If a fashion must be cabled from Paris to New York in order to be sufficiently up-to-date, it is of value only until another cable comes, and the shop is of value only in proportion as it has many successive cables. So we not only make the impermanent thing our standard of excellence, but we instantly seek to destroy that standard, and every merchant seeks to destroy the standard of every other merchant by being more alarmingly and finally and fearfully up-to-date, so that each merchant is standing on tiptoe on an uncertain pinnacle of novelty, striving each day to climb to a fresh pinnacle, where he has but a moment's rest and consolation.

And the great tragedy of this is that all the effort to gain this eminence is without reward, for having once reached the pinnacle there is only to be found the swift descent on the other side, to
begin over again the futile climb. And as all our business methods are transacted along similar lines, the many pinnacles after all form only a dead level of uncertainty and dissatisfaction. In fact, in all the history of what we call civilization there has never been any phase so futile, so unreasonable, so unprogressive as this idea of being up-to-date, which after being achieved ends only in a blind alley from which one must emerge to begin over again. One cannot wonder that there is no spirit of craftsmanship in the work that belongs to the development of the up-to-date theory. Why should imagination and skill and knowledge of beauty and love of achievement go into the thing that perishes the moment it is recognized, that furnishes no standard of excellence, that is no inspiration for the future, that has no relation to the past? The articles that are born of the up-to-date spirit must of necessity be superficial, artificial, made only for commerce, only to trick and to deceive.

And the worst of it is that the people who make these things cannot enjoy making them; the people who buy them cannot enjoy having them. There is no place for them in the world; there is no reason for their manufacture, and as a rule their existence is very brief because all unconsciously the manufacturer recognizes the true state of affairs. The products are made for what they call “the trade,” not for the life of the people.

Of course, this very extraordinary state of affairs is born out of a real reason. The most extraordinary state of affairs can always be traced back to their source. In America and slowly all over the world the standard of happiness is getting to be money. It is hard to say how this has come about. It is hard to say how any sane person can believe in it, because the getting of money in most instances is a series of tragedies, and the having of money in large quantities is a very severe and arduous occupation. But the world has been hypnotized by gold; it has forgotten the stars and the winds and the rivers, and it wants houses filled with things to show people who are either unhappy or envious about it. And so to gain these houses and all these useless things they must have money. And in order to gain these houses quickly they must make money quickly, and the word “make” money has become literally true. They do not seek it or acquire it or earn it; they make it. And they make it largely through up-to-date valueless articles that, as Mr. William Price has said recently in The Craftsman, are manufactured with the sole hope that they will hold together until they are passed over the counter. The thought early comes to one, how is it possible that a sale can be gained for such things? It is gained again through the hypnotic influence of words. People are told what to think about this trash that is sold. They are told what to believe about it, just as they are told what to believe about magazines and books and the theater and houses and furniture. And as people are not taught to think in the schools, it is not difficult to mesmerize a nation by high-sounding phrases. And as they are told what to think, so do they think. The manufacturer knows what will sell the goods, and the people give him the money because he is cleverer than they are.

And the result is that our system of trade and barter with its up-to-date standard of excellence, is a singularly demoralized one. It is interesting to think for a moment what trade originally meant,—merely giving a man what he wanted and needed, and taking from him what the trader wanted and needed. It was a mutual matter, each person gaining something good and essential, something needed in life. It was a fair exchange. It helped each man to do well the thing he wanted to do. He wanted not only his neighbors’ money in exchange, but his commendation, and as men went about visiting their neighbors from time to time, they saw held in high esteem the beautiful things they had made and sold. And the more beautiful these things were the more complete and satisfactory a man’s life was. It was so with the old Persian craftsmen. They made their exquisite delicate ware for each other, for their families, for their children, for their friends. And oftentimes a thing was so beautiful that the workman could never part with it, and it became an heirloom in his own family, for its own joy and satisfaction and pride forever. This work was always associated with the development of life, with the growth of a man’s ability, with his joy in what was beautiful, as well as with the opportunity to provide for peace and comfort. Work
in that relation was the right, necessary
essential thing in each man's life.

Today, because all the standards of
labor are vitiated, work has become a
hard and artificial thing: People have
grown to associate labor with the sad
hours of the day, with the melancholy
hours of the night. Men do not go gladly
to their work, to take up the beautiful
task which will satisfy their pride and
bring them the reward of appreciation.
They go to get their large or their meager
salary for doing the thing they do not
understand, that they more often than not
know to be valueless and insincere, asso-
ciared with business methods they must
either condemn or condone, until people no
longer regard work with friendly eyes, and
the object of practically every man and
woman's existence is to escape work, to get
others less fortunate to do their work for
them, or by the production of some up-to-
date object to avoid work altogether.

It is a strange and false and detrimental
condition, one which a nation cannot af-
ford to build upon, one which must eventually
be faced, if we are to secure recon-
struction of business methods, if we are to
avoid commercial disaster and spiritual
atrophy. A commercial system which abso-
lutely leads nowhere except into a suc-
cession of pitfalls, not only must work evil
to a nation and to the moral sense of the
people, but must in the long run work
positive disaster. It must be deadening,
not only to the ethical sense, but to the art
sense, and after all the two are one if we
look at the matter from a high enough
point of view. For unless art eventually
embodies the ethics of a nation, it will
fail and fall into dishonor. It seems to

THE CRAFTSMAN that somehow the little
Persian shop in the heart of the modern
business center of this side of the world
embodies a great lesson for us. The foun-
dation of the work done by the Persian
craftsman is honesty, sincerity, respect.
The result of the work is permanence,
beauty, satisfaction. And there we have
the beginning and the end of what all
labor should be in all parts of the world
for all time.

No people can have their labor done for
them and get the satisfaction of the finished
result that the achievement through work
itself brings, because the greatest thing in
work is your own development in the proc-

BOOK REVIEWS

THE WORKER AND THE STATE: BY
ARTHUR D. DEAN

ONE of the most sensible and compre-
hensive of the many books upon in-
dustrial education published within
the past few years is "The Worker
and the State," by Mr. Arthur D. Dean,
Chief of the Division of Trade Schools in
the New York State Education Depart-
ment. Mr. Dean writes with the authority given
by years of exhaustive study of his sub-
ject backed up by extensive practical ex-
perience as superintendent of vocational
studies at Cornell University, and director of
the elementary and continuation school
system established three years ago in New
York State in the effort to solve the problem
of practical industrial education for the
great majority of our school children.

After a general review of the situation
as it exists and the outlook for the future,
the author points out the educational sig-
nificance of our modern industrial methods
as compared with the customs of former
times. The entrance of women into the
field of general industry, and the profound
modifications effected by the change, are
considered in relation to the problem as
a whole, and then the problem of some
adequate training during the so-called
wasted years, to fit both boys and girls
for the work of later life, is given very
straightforward treatment, the defects in
the present system being frankly acknow-
ledged. After a discussion of the merits
and defects of trade unions and trade
schools, the author takes up the question
of the cooperative system of industrial
training, including factory and supplemen-
tal schools, and finally sums up with a
declaration of principles that points out
the necessity of closer relationship between
the schools and factories, and a better ar-
ticulation of educational laws with labor
laws for the purpose of conserving the
health and ability of children as a step
toward future industrial efficiency. (Pub-
lished by The Century Company, New
York. 355 pages. Price, $1.20.)

THE PRINCIPLES OF PRAGMATISM:
BY H. HEATH BAWDEN

BECAUSE of the workable common
sense of the pragmatic system of
philosophy, and its application to the
common affairs of daily life, it has taken
a deep hold upon the thought of