ONE MAN'S STORY: BY MARY FANTON ROBERTS

MAN sat alone in a small room in a great city building, his world had fallen in around him, hope had flown past, her wings brushing him but for an instant. For thirty years this man had worked with a single purpose—that this new kind of civilization in which he found himself might, through his efforts, become a more sane, reasonable, beautiful one. He had not preached merely by words, but by deeds. He had expressed his belief in the value of honesty and sincerity in his architecture; his desire for greater strength and beauty, in his furniture; he had hammered copper and planted gardens; he had brought back the fireplace into the home to increase social happiness; he had woven romance into lighting fixtures and peace into ample couches; he had brought sunlight through picturesque casement windows and had increased the health of the nation by creating the outdoor sleeping porch.

But he had dreamed too fast for the world, and suddenly in the midst of his accomplishment he found himself alone—broken, sad, with tragedy all about him in the little room in his great building.

But the building was no longer his. His friends opened the door of the little room occasionally to ask him “why he had been in such a hurry.” “Their methods had been slow and sure, and now look at them.” He did, but alas! he derived no consolation whatever therefrom. And then advisors came more cheerfully than the friends. “You must become more practical,” they said. “Give up all these foolish dreams. Wake up, put your gift into money-making channels, study the times. Give the people what they want, keep your eyes on the only real goal.” And they pronounced the word as though it were gold.

The man was not helped by this advice; he was only bewildered. “I cannot go back,” he told them. “If I have failed, it is not because I have planned too high, it must be that I have not given the people enough. I must find something better. Perhaps I have not realized how deep in the heart of the whole world is the real desire for beauty. I shall not discredit the people or myself. I will rather aim to find something more significant, more worth while, more permanently beautiful. It will be possible I know to find it, and if I find it the world will forget my first failure.”

Through months, months of sorrow, of seeming failure, of isolation, the man struggled, not to readjust past misadventure, but to find somewhere in the great storehouse of nature’s gifts for humanity something better than he had ever dreamed of before. For the time he stopped building houses, he stopped devising new comforts for the home, and gave all his attention to the study of woods, of stains, of
FURNITURE THAT WILL HARMONIZE WITH RARE BROCADES, rich tapestries, porcelains and old prints, yet will appear with equal grace in a simple room with fresh colored linens and chintzes, such as is shown here, represents the true democracy of art.
CONTACT WITH STRENGTH AND STURDINESS is good for a nation, whether that strength is in character, in architecture or in furniture: This furniture not only conveys such an impression, but in color is rich and mellow as an old violin.
AMERICAN FURNITURE should never be flamboyant nor an imitation of any period no matter how excellent it may appear: It should be honestly constructed and designed with fine thought for grace and beauty.
SO BEAUTIFULLY FINISHED is this furniture that it harmonizes with every color: The surface of the wood faintly reflects the colors near it, thus blending any groupings into unusual unity. Chintz can be combined with it as effectively as rich upholstery.
color in its relation to wood, of outline in relation to beauty and comfort. The friends and advisors came occasionally to mourn over him, but he was hardly conscious of their existence. He only knew that there was undiscovered comfort and peace and loveliness for homes which he had yet to make real for the world. He met repeated failure, he worked his way through outlines that suggested the beauty of the old art of foreign nations, through color that was new and pleasing, but not wholly satisfactory.

His work was tentative; he was feeling his way, for no dream that is of great value to the world comes suddenly to any man. It comes while he is working wisely and practically and energetically toward the best of his daily vision. It does not drop like manna out of heaven, and is not even always recognized the moment it appears. And so, sometimes the man hesitated, saying: "This is better, much better, than the past."

But he was never quite satisfied. "I want something," he said, "that will belong to all kinds of people, the rich and the poor, the old and the young. I want furniture that will harmonize with rare brocades and rich tapestries, porcelains and old prints. I want the same furniture to appear to the utmost advantage in a small room with simple chintzes, fresh colored linens and family pictures. I do not believe that there should be caste in furniture—one kind for the fortunate, another kind for the less fortunate. I believe that the really permanently beautiful furniture, rare and rich in outline and color, will belong to the people of all the world. In other words, I am seeking pure democracy in industrial art. I am no longer satisfied with oak alone. I have greatly enjoyed working in oak, its sturdiness, its strength, its durability. I believe it has helped the people of this country to do away with futile ornamentation, with puerile artificiality. I feel that contact with strength and sturdiness is good for a nation, whether that strength is in character, in architecture or in furniture.

"I have never been quite satisfied to work in mahogany. It belongs to the delicate, self-satisfied civilization of the early Colonial days, to the people who were finding their first beauty after many primitive pioneer hardships. It has no variation in the impression it gives. It is the George Washington type of furniture rather than the Abraham Lincoln type."

And so the man continued his work, living with his woods and his colors as a musician lives with his instrument, dreaming far into the future. "I want," he said, "furniture so excellent, so truly refined, so desirable that it can set a standard in house furnishing; that if placed in a room where things are poor and ugly and
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useless, it will so proclaim them; that will as a matter of fact force a standard, that must bring about greater refinement and beauty in home decoration. I intend that all the efforts of my days shall be the building toward this accomplishment. And when I achieve it, I will regard it as the final flower on the root and branch of my life's work.

The man came from his workshop one day with a piece of wood in his hand. The few inches of wood had been neatly turned by hand so that the surface was a succession of high lights and shadows. The high lights were a delicate toned brown and the shadows a gray-brown in the recesses of the spool-like surface. This bit of wood, small as it was, unrelated to any piece of furniture, nevertheless carried about it a certain quality of mysterious beauty. The lighter note of brown seemed to be so porous as to suggest gold leaf underneath, and the gray like a bit of cloud lingering in the shadow. Now as a matter of fact there was no gold leaf, the beauty of the oval was entirely in the finish of the wood, the original very hard surface had been fumed and highly polished, and then the actual tone of the wood was brought out and grayed off slightly for the upper high light. The feeling one had instantly was of something really picturesque, beautiful as a poem or a piece of music. One could see that it was strong and durable and permanent, but withal there was a certain flower-like quality as though the man had conceived something inevitably and irrevocably beautiful. This little piece of grooved wood was the beginning of the new furniture, the "better thing" that the man had promised to himself that he would find.

"The minute I had finished this piece I knew I had what I was seeking for," he said. "I had never been sure before. All summer and through the fall I had been working, testing colors and textures; but just as soon as this was finished and polished I realized that the work I wanted to accomplish in the future was along this line. Not inevitably with the gray shadow; all brown tones would be just as effective, or brown and green or brown and orange. Indeed, there is no limit to the gracious color combinations that may be produced through the new process that I have at last perfected."

IT was at least two months later. The man had returned to New York and on the same day came shipments from his workshop—a table, a long, low couch or day-bed and a chair. Just as soon as these pieces were uncovered, put in the right light and grouped together, one realized the exceptional and extraordinarily beautiful quality that had been born through months of struggle, and at times almost despair. Every particle of the surface had a velvety finish
that was like looking through a mirror at wood, and every inch of the surface seemed to vary in tone. The couch was finished all in brown, lighter on the edges of the turned legs and in the edges of the stretchers, the outline very simple, but each piece beautifully turned in order that the play of light on the higher edges would bring about an unceasing diversity of beauty. So clear, so beautifully finished was the surface of the wood that it harmonized exquisitely with every color. First a wonderful Gobelin blue was put over the mattress, with figured blue tapestry pillow in many tones as well as blue, and the surface of the wood reflected the blue and reflected the reds and greens in the tapestry and seemed the perfect upholstery. When the blue was discarded a mulberry velvet was folded over the mattress and a chintz with mulberry, green and yellow tones was added for pillows. This in turn seemed to satisfy the color of the wood as perfectly as the blue had. After the mulberry a rich olive green was tried, and then an orange. It was an extraordinary experiment. It was as though the wood of the couch had a personality which took on the colors that were thrown across it, and yet when all the colors were taken away held its own character, too inherently fine and beautiful to become or to seem anything else.

As one studied the proportion of the couch, the tone of the wood, the depth of it and the richness, its constant variation in every change of light, it seemed almost to have the quality of a Stradivarius violin. One never thinks of a beautiful violin as just a piece of wood, a bit of mechanism. Each fine violin has a personality all its own. It becomes in time a separate entity, with its various moods gay and sad. There is no small wonder in the making of a piece of furniture that could affect the beholder as does a rare old Cremona or Stradivarius.

It is quite extraordinary, the depth the wood surface, finished in the way described, possesses. It is as though there were several surfaces or overtones, as one feels in music the dragging of one tone over the other by expert handling of the keys. One’s first impression of such a wood finish is that it must be a very fragile thing like Bohemian glass or the old Cyprus glass with its magical colors—the work of time. But this is not true of the new Chromewald furniture. It is, so far as we reckon time in speaking of furniture, imperishable; it will not crack, split or warp. The color will not wear off, and a variation of climate will never bring to it the blueness which sometimes appears on mahogany. It is truly museum furniture or heirloom furniture as one may prefer to call it.

And it does seem worth while that anything so permanent in quality should have also a rare distinction which seems to separate it
from all other furniture ever made. It is quite as comfortable as
the plainest kind of every-day furniture, but in line and color and
in the fabrics which complement it, it is aristocratic to a degree in
appearance. It is easy to see that such furniture is really made
for all people and all time, with a durability that is never sacrificed
to prettiness and a beauty that is never sacrificed to comfort, and a
comfort that embraces all the qualities of the various types of furni-
ture that have outlived their generations of owners. It seems reason-
able to believe that at last an American furniture for an enlightened
and cultured democracy had been devised.

And yet a more modest type of furniture it would be hard to
imagine. It is never flamboyant, it is never over-brilliant, it is never
an imitation of the painted Colonial or the elaborate Buhl, or the
Mediaeval Italian. It is as quiet as a grove and as gentle as the
little brook running through, and one can appreciate at a first glance
that it is truly American. For that reason it cannot be an imitation,
a veneer, it must be honest with the sturdiness of old peasant furni-
ture and the beauty of the old court periods, only carried a step
further, as though the peasant and the courtier had intermarried
and as though in their offspring were found all the best qualities of
both.

In color, where the brown is used, a pine cone, perhaps, is the
closest analogy, with all the variations of color and the fineness
of texture to be found in a ripe cone. Where the more vivid colors
are added, the variation becomes a matter of taste. It may be light
or dark, brilliant or cloudy as suit the taste of the individual.
In studying this new type of furniture, especially where color is in
combination with brown, one feels immediately that furniture should
set the color note of the room; that it should not be furnished by
the walls or in the rugs, a rare embroidery or brilliant fabrics and
draperies; preëminently it should be the furniture itself which is
always the foreground, not the background, of the room. And people
who try the new “picture furniture,” having found in it exactly the
color they wish, will do well first of all to place it in a room, then
select the rug that is modestly harmonious, the walls in gentle retire-
ment from the furniture and the fabrics, tapestries, etc., in order to
bring out the color of the furniture, to modify it, to add variation.
By using a color in the furniture which has not a hard, waxed surface or
brilliant applied decoration, but that seems inherent in the wood, a
wonderful atmospheric effect is gained which can be attained in no
other way.

Windows that are draped with a succession of clouds of chiffon
achieve just the same beauty of coloring that is to be found in the
A MORE MODEST TYPE OF FURNITURE or a more reliable would be hard to imagine than this new production of the Craftsman shops: Its inherent quality of beauty and simplicity will endure unchanged through many generations.
IN COLOR AND FINENESS OF TEXTURE this furniture is like a brown pine cone revealing the same quality of shadow and high lights: It is comfortable to live with, yet has the sturdiness of the pioneer.
new Chromewald furniture. If it is yellow, it is yellow in one light and pale corn in another and shading into brown or flaming into bright orange in the sunlight. All of this must produce an effect of color through the air just as one gets it through the several different toned thicknesses of chiffon at the windows.

As a rule, as we have already said, this furniture may be in some neutral tone, the brown of the pine cone, the gray of misty air in green woods, the green of spring orchards, or combined with brilliant tones, and where no particular high color note is struck, still the shade of this furniture should be the keynote of the color harmony of the room, otherwise the unusual sense of perfect beauty cannot be attained.

Of course a few pieces of this furniture could be added as picture chairs or couches or tables to rooms furnished in almost any style, just as one adds a single rich piece of Jacobean, a lovely Louis chair or an old Italian painted cabinet. But the greater perfection will be attained by the closer harmony throughout the furnishing.

In a short time, in addition to the larger pieces of furniture, lamp bases will be made to match furniture sets, candlesticks will appear in varied colors and all kinds of small decorative fittings will be produced in this mysteriously beautiful new scheme of furnishing. Where only a few pieces are used in a room furnished in other styles, the method of using it should be studied very carefully. An orange picture chair or a deep rose picture table would do for the ordinary room what a bunch of red tulips or a jar full of golden rod or a vase of La France roses have been relied upon to do so often in the past.

The beautiful velvety quality of this wood and the rich tones which may be employed remind one not a little of the Martine glass which Poiret was bringing out in France just before the war. It carried just such browns, yellows and rose and red and blue and green as Mr. Stickley is planning to introduce into his Chromewald furniture. One could imagine nothing more beautiful indeed than a combination of the Martine glass and the Chromewald furniture.

As yet no one has seen a succession of rooms furnished in the fashion which we have already described, with colors so translucent, so flowerlike, with brown so rich and velvety, with construction so well thought out, with wood so durable. It will be little short of entralling to enter a house completely outfitted in this fashion—from hall to reception room, to dining room, bedroom and eventually of course the little nursery.

The writer sat the other day in front of a group of this furniture, studying it for a long time with interest, with sympathy, with under-
standing, and in the course of an hour or so realized that there was actually a plaintive quality in the beauty of the wood, something so simple, so delicately beautiful that it touched the heart like a gentle folk song, and then for the first time fully appreciated what such furniture could mean to the people, because with its qualities of simplicity and sturdiness, of rich beauty and variation, it suggested the very attributes which we most admire in the great mass of humanity—the intelligent, democratic humanity that lives for the future, reveres the past and desires great happiness, great comfort and great beauty for the present.

It is as though by love and fine purpose and keen appreciation, the maker of this furniture had somehow endowed the finished product with the memories of the woodland days, when the sun poured through the branches and the wind lifted the leaves and the rain cooled and refreshed the roots. These are the things that make life possible to the tree and must be inherent in the tree and that somehow seem to reach one through the beauty, the luster and the richness of the wood itself in its final presentation.