

45106

X91.72

G9

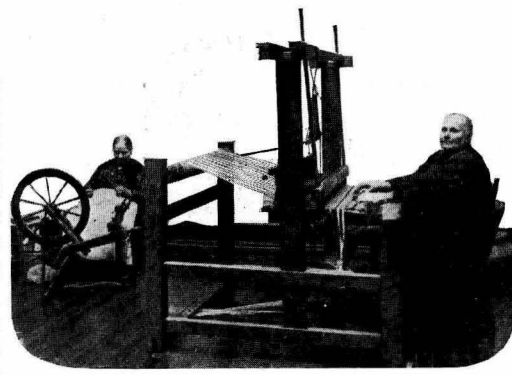
791
Dhananjayrao Gadgil Library
GIPE-PUNE-045106

Handicrafts from Coast to Coast

Many Cottage Industries, both native and introduced, have been saved from extinction by the Canadian Handicrafts Guild

By M. A. PECK

WHEN the arts and crafts of a country gain recognition that country takes a new position in the respect of the world. No nation began with fine buildings, great sculptures, noble paintings. They all began with the lowly crafts. The savage who scratched a rude picture on the rock, the woman who made a jar in which water could be stored, the weaver who made a loom out of a couple of branches, these were the founders from whose efforts art finally reached



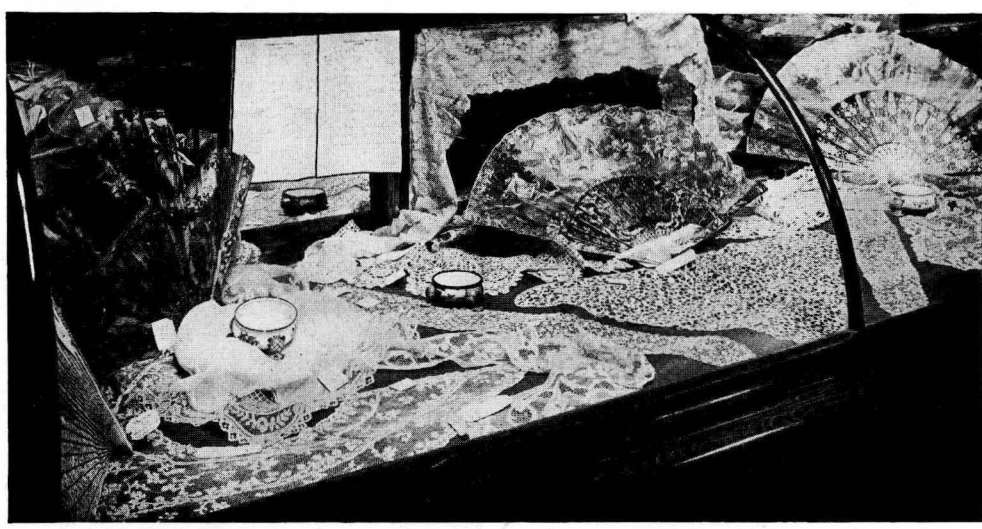
Two women from St. Irenée demonstrating spinning and weaving at the 1905 exhibition, in the galleries of the Art Association of Montreal.

the heavens and has strewn the earth with beauty.

In 1896 many of the cottage industries in the eastern provinces of Canada were in a very languishing condition and in some districts they were already becoming extinct. In the west except among the Indian

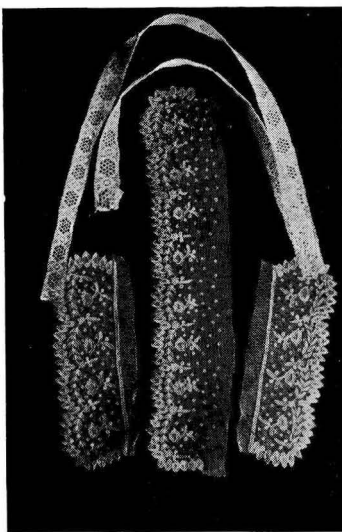
tribes they were non-existent or merely appeared in widely separated localities.

About this time a small committee of ladies in Montreal who were working with the Women's Art Association of Canada became so deeply interested in



Some of the things lent for the 1900 exhibition. In this case are fans and old lace from Government House, Ottawa. There were also fine hand-bound books from McGill University and many private libraries, silver, old lace, furniture and miniatures.

conserving the minor arts that they felt that they should devote every energy to reviving and making profitable all such crafts as could be carried on in cottage or castle, in town or in the remotest part of the country. They were sure that if such effort were successful the country would become happier, healthier and wealthier, and that hundreds of homes would be lifted into a different sphere through the contacts that would result. The Atlantic and the Pacific seemed a far cry from each other, but it was the aim of these enthusiasts to reach from sea to sea, and certainly by 1909 this aim was no longer a dream, for by

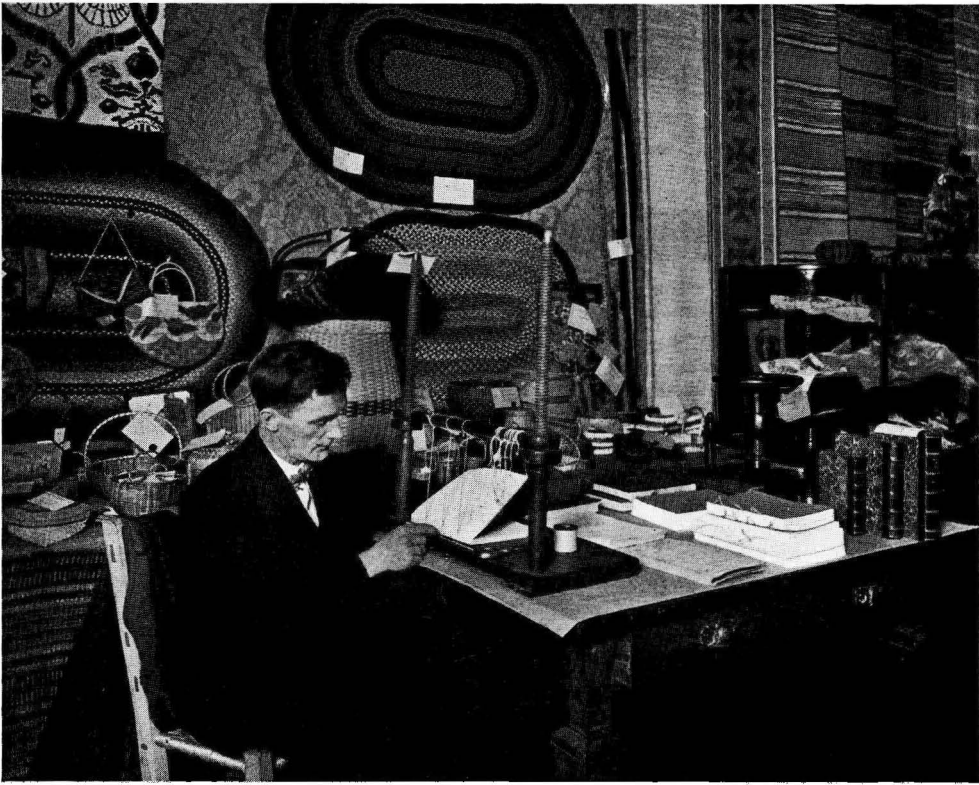


Lace, the work of an Irish immigrant who had made the flounces for the wedding-dress of Her late Majesty Queen Alexandra. In 1911 Her Majesty Queen Mary graciously consented to accept from the Guild a specimen of each craft practised in Canada at that date. A handkerchief made by this worker was included in the gift.

that date craftsmen and women from Prince Edward Island to British Columbia were sending in their hand-work for exhibition and sale. People are now asking how this was accomplished and an answer should be forthcoming. It meant work, work, work and the love that is born of contact with human beings who want to express the best that is in them and sometimes need a helping hand to do it. One of the deepest instincts of humanity is the desire to leave behind something worth while—the urge that causes the poet to sing, the artist to paint, the potter to mould the clay. It is only the tremendous



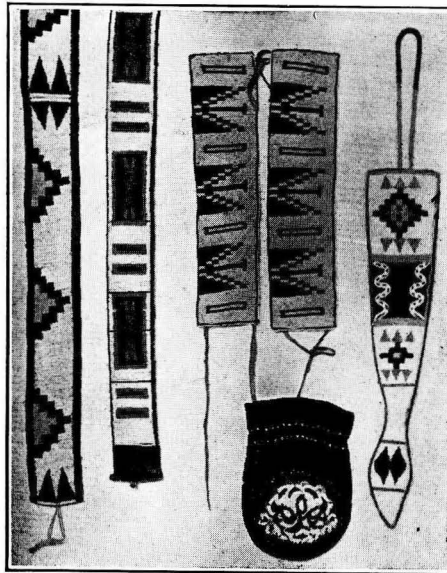
The present shop operated by the Guild for the benefit of craftsmen who are not in a position to sell for themselves.



A returned soldier demonstrating book-binding at the 1927 exhibition. Unable to carry on at his former work, he was taught book-binding and now holds a good position and is able to support his family happily. He has taught his step-son book-binding, and he also does good work.

labour that has been necessary to open up this great country that has prevented the earlier development of the artistic side of Canadian home industries.

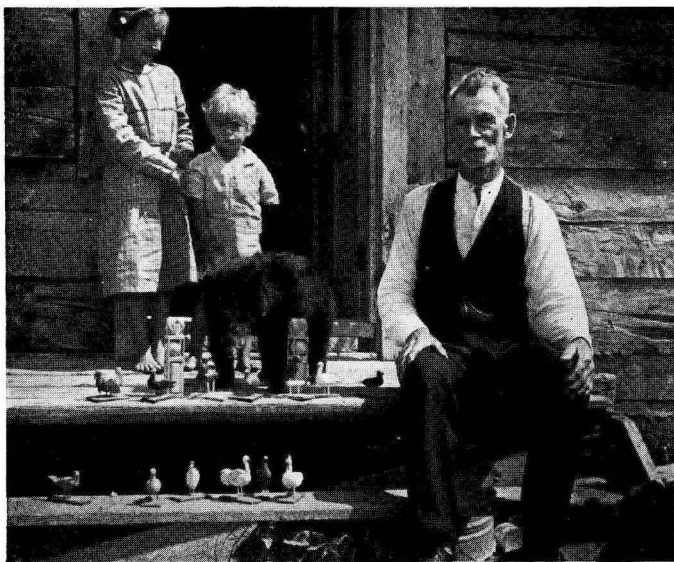
As to the methods that have been employed to prevent the loss of skill and knowledge among native Canadians and foreigners coming into the Dominion a few words must suffice. In 1900 the ladies' committee determined to hold a large exhibition of handicrafts, not necessarily all Canadian. The coffers were empty, no



In the five long pieces of bead-work the designs are pure Indian. The bag shows the influence of the white man, and is consequently less interesting.

one had any experience in exhibitions, and every one knew that such an exhibition would entail much labour and expense, but they believed that it would launch the movement. The Committee collected treasures both old and new, and Lord Strathcona opened an exhibition that aroused public interest in the endeavour, and ended with what was then considered a substantial bank account.

After this a regular campaign was planned for the summer of 1901. Each



The farmer makes a pretty bird for his grandchild. The visitor asked, "Que disent-ils au couteau, les petits oiseaux?" The old man thought for a moment and then sang softly, "Que fais-tu, Frédéric, Frédéric, Frédéric?"

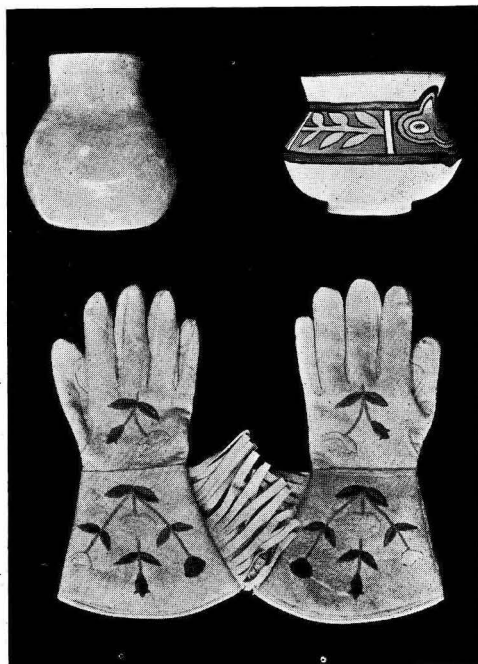
member of the committee pledged herself to search out crafts-workers in whatever part of the country she spent the summer. Small exhibitions and sales were held at summer resorts; the clergy willingly explained to their parishoners what was being done, and many isolated workers were found. Crafts that were being abandoned were revived and some weavers were so helped that within two years they were earning several hundred dollars, and a village industry was established that still exists and sends good rag carpet (catalogne) to the Guild.

In another part of the country the people became so interested in what was being done that they now hold their own annual exhibition and sell all that they can make. Unexpected crafts have come to light, a new interest has come to the cottage kitchen and a few little luxuries are permitted to the thrifty wife. Five districts were opened up by the end of 1901.

In 1902 the same system was carried on and the committee sent a lady who had studied vegetable dyeing to revive this art among the women, who now began to take a pride in work that had been held in rather low esteem, and several new villages were made active.

In the autumn another notable exhibition was held. This time only Canadian crafts were shown. The public was

surprised to find that Canada could hold her own in the minor crafts, for she possesses much skill among her varied population. At this time the system of offering money prizes for good work was inaugurated, and there is no doubt that this was greatly appreciated



Pottery from British Columbia, and Indian gauntlets from Alberta.

A train-coupler paralysed in a railway accident in 1901, this man was a burden to a very poor family. He was taught basket weaving. When he sold his first basket he said, "Pour cet hiver j'ai mon tabac." Later he supported the family and his mother said, "Notre Michel n'est pas mal distingué, je vous assure. Ses paniers sont partout."



by the workers as well as the honourable mention ribbons that are now displayed with pride in every corner of the Dominion. That these two exhibitions laid the foundation of the craft movement no one can doubt. After the second, the committee was able to open

the little Handicrafts Shop in Montreal, that since that day has never closed its doors to good hand-work of any kind, the only restriction being that it must be made in Canada.

From this time things moved rapidly. A member of the committee addressed the National Council of Women at Toronto and later at Winnipeg. Then the Royal Society of Canada asked for information, which on being given was incorporated in their 1905 Report. A questionnaire came from the Royal Commission on Industrial Training for Women; a delegation came from the Royal Technical Society at Ottawa to enquire into the result attained by the handicrafts movement, when great surprise was expressed at its very evident success. Then an exhibit was sent, at the request of the government, to St. Louis World's Fair. A lady went in charge and remained there for six months doing much to make Canadian handicrafts known and appreciated in the United States. Up to 1914 the Guild sent craftwork from all over Canada with the Government Exhibitions to various parts of the Empire and was represented at the Irish International Exhibition at Dublin in 1907; the Australian Exhibition of Women's Work in Melbourne, 1907; the Franco-British Exhibition in London, 1908; the Imperial Exhibition at the White City,

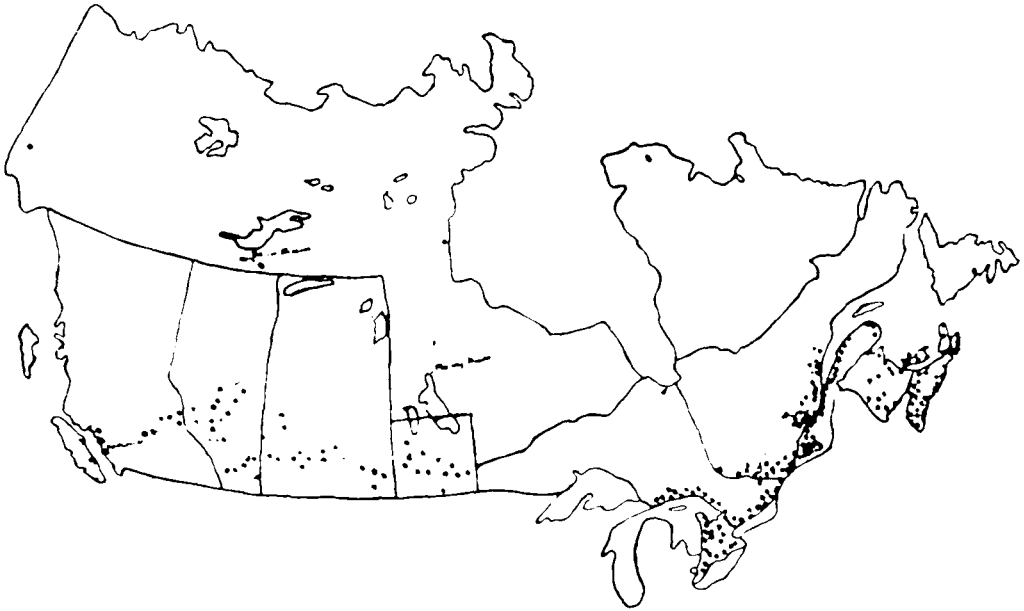


Presented to Her Majesty, Queen Mary in 1911, a bark box elaborately decorated with porcupine quills.

It need hardly be emphasized that there is a distinct relationship between handicrafts and geography. Handicrafts show something of the development of the human endeavour for comfort and artistic expression in relation to the resources, climate and scenery of various localities in addition to reflecting to some degree, social conditions and ideas.

Canadian handicrafts offer a particularly rich field for study. There are first the aboriginal crafts and their territorial variations; original designs and the effects of contact with the white man's resources and ideas, of which Indian beadwork is a good example. Then the influx of immigrants from various parts of Europe, where characteristic cottage industries have flourished for hundreds of years, has resulted in the appearance of new crafts and designs in various parts of the country and their adaptation to new environments. Finally there are the handicrafts of the two principal branches of the Canadian people, some of them only recently revived.

HANDICRAFTS VIEWED GEOGRAPHICALLY



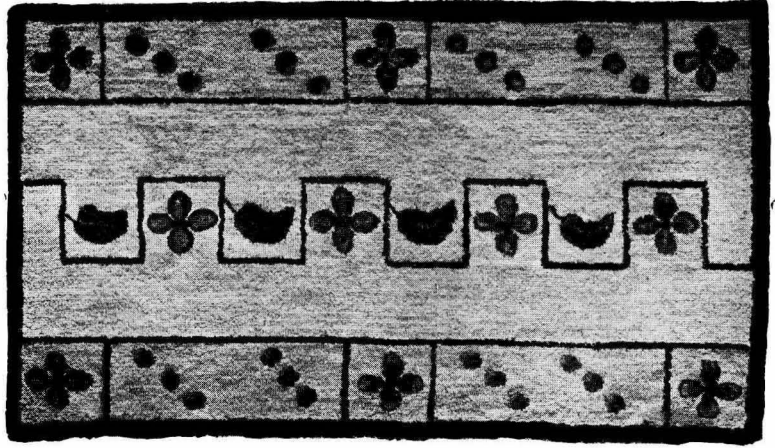
The Activities of the
Canadian Handicrafts Guild
Cover the Length and
Breadth of the Dominion

The dotted locations on this map show the vast territory being covered by the Guild as early as 1910, when workers were found in lower Quebec 600 miles from Montreal

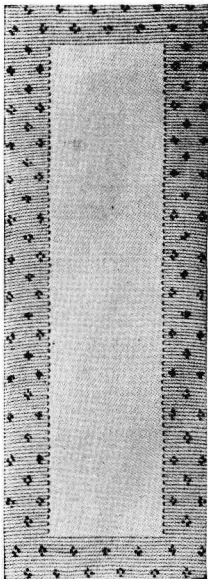
P.E.I., N.S. and N.B.	700	"	"	"
Mingan	500	"	"	"
St. Anthony	700	"	"	"
Muskoka	600	"	west of	"
Buchanan	2000	"	"	"
Ungava	1700	"	north	"
Great Slave Lake				North West Territories.

Today, a similar map would show heavy representations of crafts-workers in all Provinces.

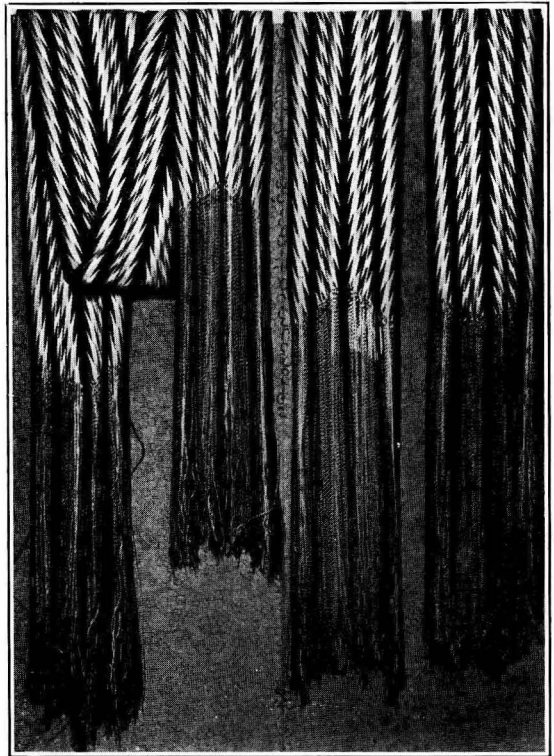
*A hooked rug at the
1924 exhibition.*



*Above:—Hooked rug
of original design.*



*At left:—A portiere
in tufted weaving.*



At the 1902 exhibition for the first time something was done to prevent the loss of the art of the ceinture fléchée, the sash that, made by his sweetheart, was worn by voyageur or coureur-de-bois to prevent the chill that comes of exhaustion, sometimes to be tightened to allay the pangs of hunger. The weaving of this sash, now so highly prized by collector and museum, was on the verge of becoming a lost art. Note the very decorative fringe.



For the last ten years immigrant children have been taught so that they should not forget the crafts of their ancestors. At the exhibitions their work is shown.

London, 1909; the Festival of Empire, London, 1911; the Royal Albert Hall, London, and twice at Wembley. On each of these occasions the Government gave a small grant, and though the

Guild was often out of pocket the craftsmen were always benefitted and Canada gradually gained a reputation for her minor crafts. By 1914 one hundred and forty-three exhibits had gone out from the little shop.

While all this was going on it was found that the charter of the W.A.A.C. was not elastic enough for the enterprises on which the Montreal Branch had embarked, and it was decided that a separate charter should be applied for. By 1906 this was finally accomplished and a new society emerged under the name of The Canadian Handicrafts Guild, a name that has become familiar in many countries.

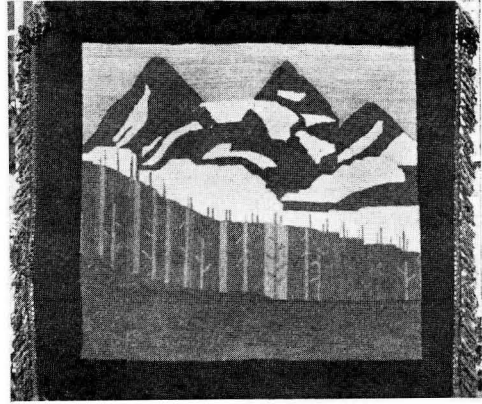
It now became possible to establish agencies in many parts of Canada, in England, in Bermuda, and in the United States. Judges, too, were asked for by many Provincial Exhibitions and County Fairs.



Woodcarving at the 1905 exhibition, executed by Mrs. W. R. Miller, Philip Gilbert, and the late F. L. Wanklyn.

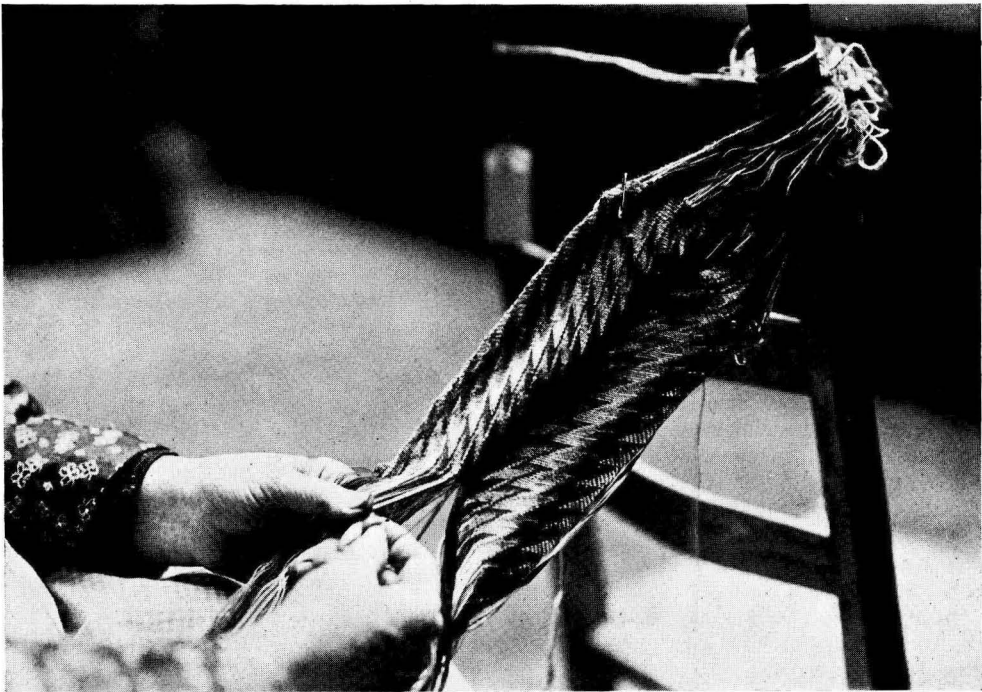
About this time Dr. (now Sir) Wilfred Grenfell, who was alive to the enormous value of craftsmanship to the isolated peoples of The Labrador, sought the help of the Guild and quantities of wool and other materials were shipped to St. Anthony, the Mission Station that has since become famous for its beautiful rugs. The following year the *Montreal Star* offered prizes for an essay on Handicrafts. This was announced in the seventy-three newspapers with which the Guild had established connections. Eighty-one essays were sent in and the prizes were awarded in Ontario and British Columbia, with an Honourable Mention in New Brunswick.

Many people think that the Guild makes money. This is impossible. It bears part of the expense of every parcel of work that is sent in; it helps craftsmen when necessity arises; it has very heavy overhead expenses; it has homespun cleaned and shrunk before being placed on sale; it has sent out over three hundred exhibitions, some of which come back in a damaged con-



This remarkable piece of tapestry weaving was made by the wife of a Scotch farmer in New Brunswick. She wrote "I spent the summer at my son's ranch near Banff and when I got home I just had to make those Three Sisters."

dition. Even so it has never come before the public to beg for money; it has never been in debt. How then could it make money? But the Dominion has benefitted for the Guild has paid out to craftsmen and women, many of whom



Weaving the ceinture fléchée. After the exhibition of 1902, Mme Venne was engaged to give lessons to members, some of whom became expert. The weave is not unlike the flame-weaving, an art that was lost for years to Italy, and was revived lately.



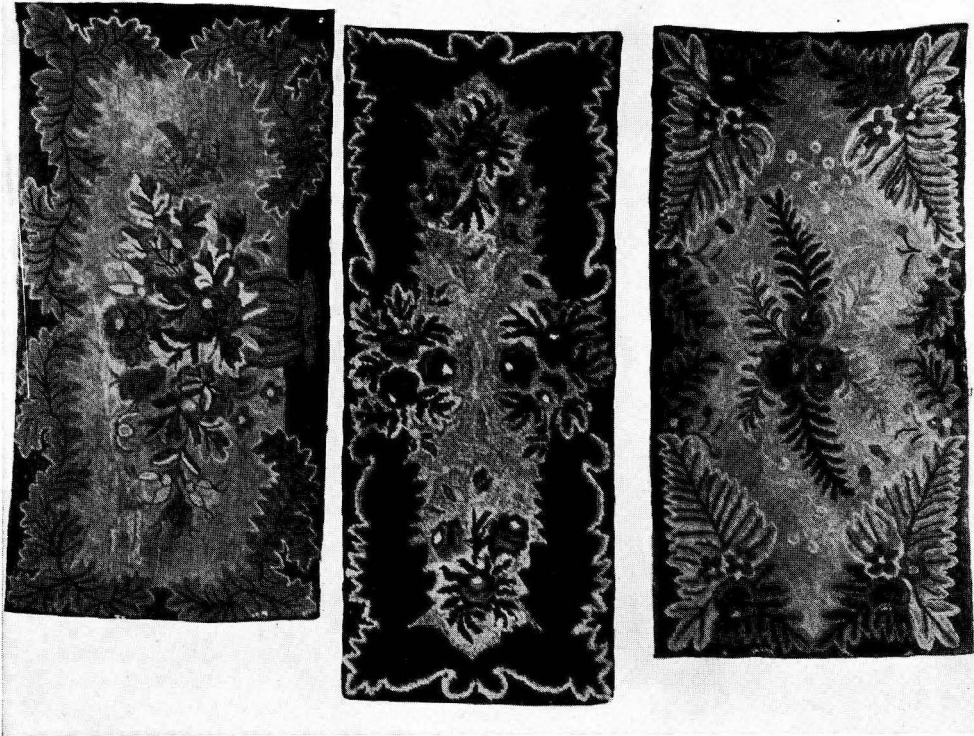
Woven by a Norwegian living in Canada who used Canadian wool, dyed by herself.

are not in a position to sell for themselves, over one million dollars.

As already mentioned up to 1914 five visits had been made through the Dominion and the objects of the Guild began to be clearly understood. But during the Great War its activities became curtailed. Much of the gratuitous aid was diverted into more urgent channels, and did not revive again until the exhaustion caused by the terrible upheaval began to be overcome. Now, however, the Guild is showing its old vigour. Again it sends its visitors through the country; again former branches are at work, and agencies are reestablished, and many new steps are being taken.

Where the crafts flourish there will be found a happy and contented people who have interests outside their daily labour, and a chance to increase the income that the annual crops fail to give them. It will be found too, that among craftworkers the folk-song lin-

gers and adds joy of life. To illustrate this the writer might be permitted to digress a little. It was her privilege, during a visit to Cape Breton Island, to be invited to a Milling Frolic, a meeting when the weavers come together to mill their cloth. In a long room which had once housed the aeroplanes of Alexander Graham Bell, stood a long narrow table, on one side of which sat a number of Scotsmen and on the other the same number of girls. On the table lay many yards of wet homespun. Soon a fine old man sang with vigour a Gaelic song and immediately everyone swung the cloth on and on, up one side of the table, down the other joining merrily in the chorus. When this had gone on for some time, the writer asked, "How long does it take to shrink this piece of cloth?" "Oh, about four songs," answered a weaver. At this moment the weaver of the cloth came to inspect the work. "Eh mon", she said, "It isna' rechtly



Hooked rugs from Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, owned by Professor Traquair, and shown at the 1929 Exhibition.

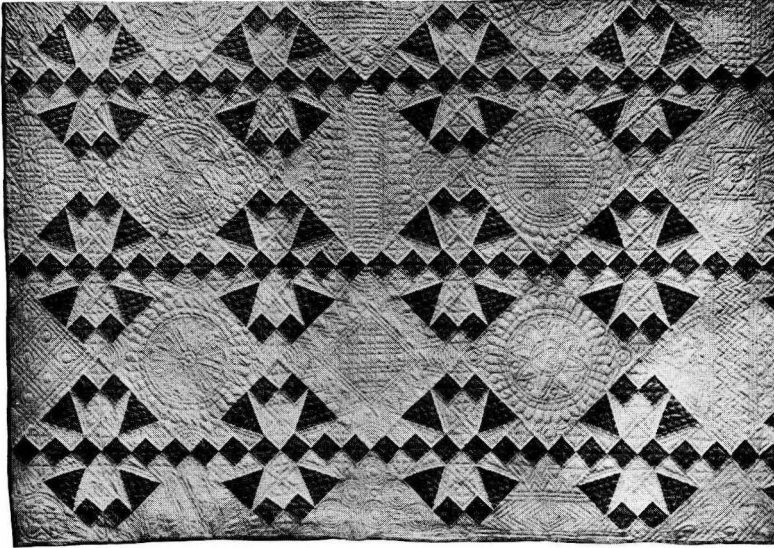
done yet. Gie it anither song," and accordingly another song cheered the party to renewed effort. When the cloth was milled it was rolled up to finish its own work, and youths and maidens, old men and matrons enjoyed the frolic.

The craftsman finds in every little village those who understand his passion to express his love of nature that surrounds him. The blacksmith makes now and again a little iron rose, the old farmer whittles a pretty bird for his grandchild, the boy tries to make something that will whistle like a wild duck, and often they succeed in fashioning a thing of real beauty. Some of them are, like the flower "born to blush unseen," but it is one of the aims of the Guild that they may at least bloom happily.

There is naturally a great difference between the working of the Canadian Handicrafts Guild and that of similar organizations in Great Britain and other countries in Europe. There a society

deals with people of one language, one religion, with established standards, ideals, conditions, and over an area of hundreds of miles. Here there are peoples of many tongues, many religions, differing standards, conditions that change constantly, and over an area that covers thousands of miles; miles that during the winter are deep in snow. The work of the Guild is therefore more complicated than that of settled countries. The question of the language alone makes this evident, for the notice board lately bore information in nine foreign languages, besides English and French.

Notwithstanding the difficulties, much has been done to prevent the extinction of the cottage industries both native and foreign. Perhaps the enthusiastic support accorded to the work accounts for much of its success. Everyone who serves in any capacity, from the President to the packer of parcels, becomes, within a month, not only interested but



A very fine patchwork bedspread, of very old design, beautifully quilted, made by a woman in New Brunswick.

devoted to the interests of the crafts. Every officer, every member of the committee or the staff becomes willing to give long hours of overtime to advance the work, because they believe that not only individuals are benefitted but that an art-foundation is being laid for Canada.

Letters that are received show some of the good efforts of contacts made. The Secretary and the Manager of the Shop are addressed as "sister" or "mother", and many a plaintive tale or a simple joy is revealed to "dear friend" from outlying districts. It is not only a matter of money, that is distributed to the cottage, it is the friendship that goes and comes with the letters. "Thank you so much for the criticism and the suggestions that you have given me. They help so much. You are always so kind." From the wife of a clergyman in the far west who had sent some fine embroidery to the prize competition and had received \$52.00 and a prize of \$10.00; "The prize money, the sale and the order have made it possible to send our two sons to school." From an Italian who had himself received a college education but could not give the same to his boys; "I have now always work; not much, but enough to save me the humiliation of going on public charity, and I am content." A scolding letter is sometimes received when work has been

returned to a weaver because it is not up to the high standard required by the Guild. "Vous êtes bien particulière, Madame, mais le payement est bon."

After 1919 it was considered advisable to try to arouse the interest that had been diverted during and after the



Carved slate dish inlaid with mother-of-pearl tribal legend design; from Queen Charlotte Islands.

Rugs from four provinces at the 1927 exhibition show how popular these floor coverings had now become. In 1909 small rugs were made in many a cottage. By 1927, owing to the encouragement given by these annual exhibitions, the craft came to be appreciated and a rug 27 feet long was ordered. Since this time many large rugs have been successfully made.

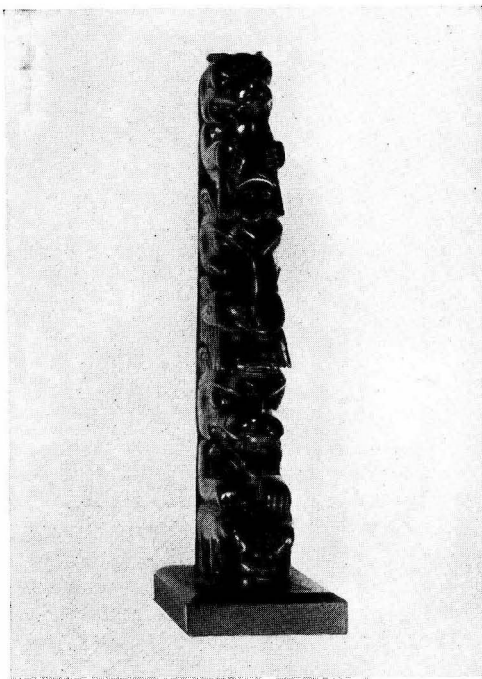


Great War; particularly noticeable in the western provinces and most important to revive. It was decided by the Committee, which had now for a number of years been composed of both men and

women, that owing to the growth of the work it would be wise to establish autonomous Provincial Branches which could take over much of the work that had been carried on from Montreal since 1906. This has made the work more efficient as committees on the spot are able to make direct contacts with the craftsmen quickly and much more thoroughly than those separated from the worker by thousands of miles. The work has shown a new vitality that is most encouraging to those who have borne the burden and heat of the day.

And now came something of great value to the Guild. The Canadian Pacific Railway began its New Canadian Handicraft Festivals throughout the West and invited the Guild to undertake the handicraft section. It need scarcely be pointed out this was a fine advertisement, but what is not so generally understood is that it was also of real cultural and historical value to the country. At the Festivals one could envisage the extraordinary growth of the population and observe the types of men and women who were to influence the people of the Dominion, and one could make a rough estimate as to what kind of influence that would be.

In any case the Festivals were of great value to the Guild. The newly



Slate totem pole from the Queen Charlotte Islands, carved by a Haida Indian.



Hand-bags made of homespun woven by French-Canadians, embroidered in Nova Scotia by English-Canadians, have always commanded ready sale.

organized Provincial Branch of Manitoba showed its metal in 1928 when with the help of two ladies from Montreal, it planned and carried out an exhibition the excellence of which was a matter of pride to all. The British Columbia Branch, too had its exhibitions and sales so making the work of that province more effective. Many private houses and lovely gardens were opened for craft lectures and sales, a shop was opened, and much was accomplished. In British Columbia one finds some wonderful collections of the Indian crafts, specimens of which are unfortunately becoming exceedingly rare. If the British Columbia Branch can prevent the loss of the skill of the tribes living on the west coast it will have done much for both the Indian and Canada.

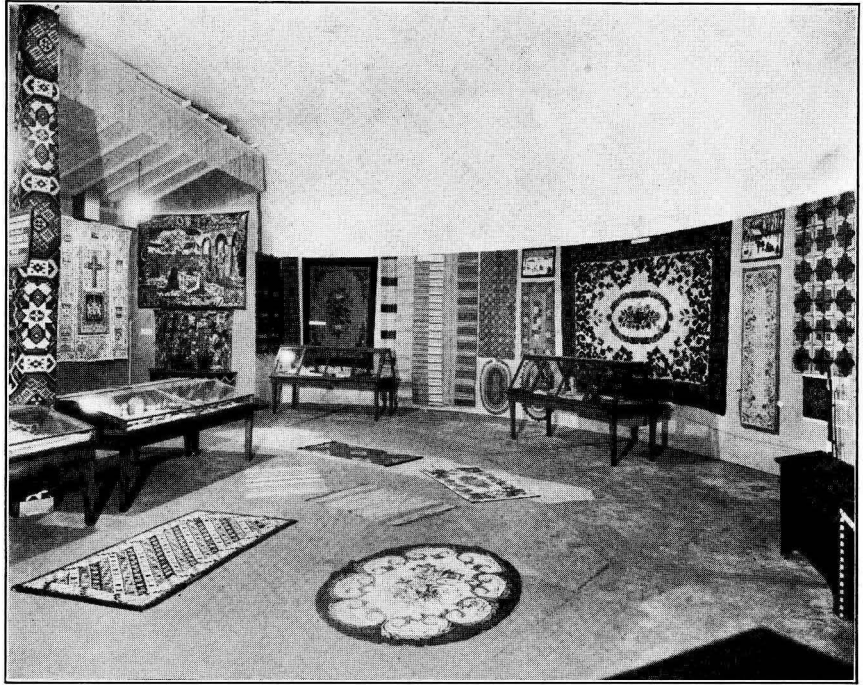
The Alberta Provincial Branch also held a most successful exhibition at Edmonton when the fine accommodation in Macdonald Hotel made an excellent setting for the lovely examples of craft-work that were collected with the help of all the branches of the Guild. Calgary, too, had her chance at the next Festival when many new settlers sent in work that had been made in their new homes. Regina had the Saskatchewan Branch opening the following year. Seven of the nine provinces were now active, and this Branch in the West seemed thoroughly

to realize its possibilities and its responsibilities. Agencies that had been established in 1909 were reopened and many new ones were added, and by 1930 there were thirty-eight summer agencies and about twenty working the year round.

In Montreal for the last ten years classes have been held for children, both native and foreign, lest they should forget the skill of their fathers. Trained teachers have been engaged and about sixty children attend the daily classes, under the supervision of the Technical Committee.

Another activity, undertaken by the Extension Committee, was a course of free lectures, given with the hearty cooperation of McGill University and the various Consulates then resident in Montreal. These were arranged to inform the public with regard to the arts and crafts of the countries from which Canada was receiving immigrants so that we might be the better prepared to conserve their great skill and knowledge.

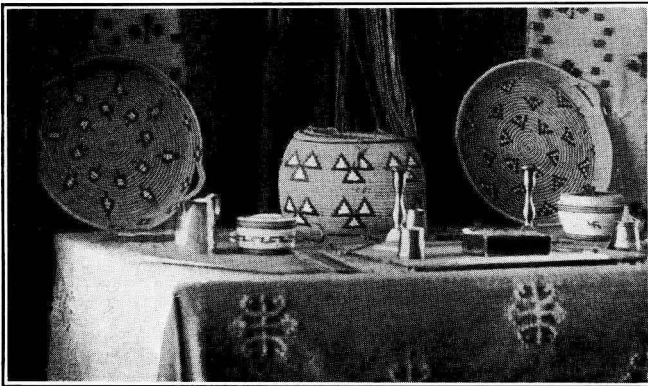
Perhaps the most striking achievement of the Guild is the establishment of the rug industry. Hundreds of rugs had been sent in to the Guild's exhibitions but they had always been of small dimensions. Now came an order for



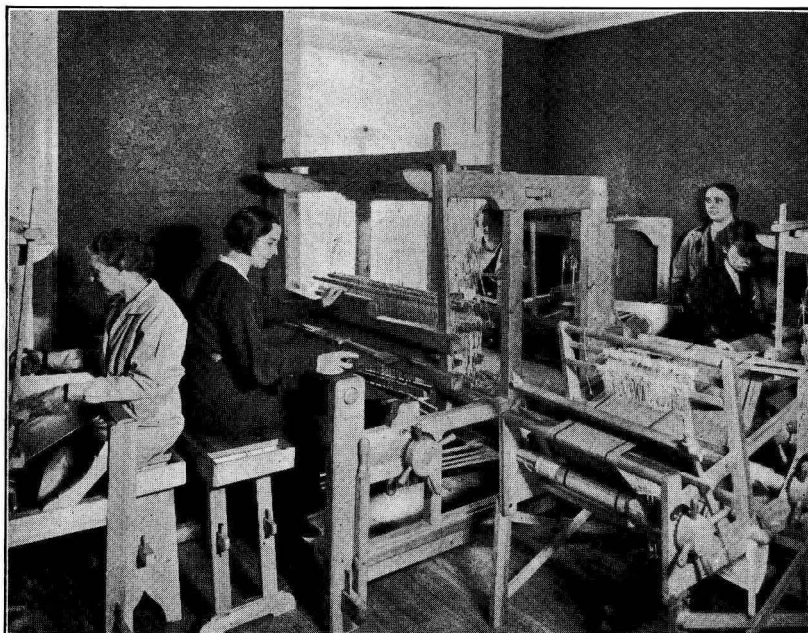
Part of work shown by the Guild at the Canadian National Exhibition in Toronto in 1933, which was visited by over seventy-five thousand people.

Batik is among the crafts encouraged by the Guild. This piece, owned privately, was shown at the 1928 exhibition. Through the courtesy of the Art Association, the annual exhibitions have for many years been held in the Art Galleries of Montreal.

Below:—Cedar root trays and baskets, from the Haida Indians, now in the Guild Museum.



In 1933 one of the long planned schemes of the Guild was accomplished when the School of Weaving was opened. This has already aroused much interest and it is well attended. Several of the pupils are earning good money. One is making his own living.



two rugs each to be twenty-two feet long. Here was the very thing for which the Guild had waited, the proof that orders could be carried out. Twelve women were found to make the rugs. They were obliged to set up their frame in an old barn as no one had a room large enough to hold one of such size. During the summer a storm destroyed part of the roof of the barn but the work went on and in November a pair of very handsome rugs were placed on view on the walls of the Art Association of Montreal. No such order could have been considered even a few years ago, since then many orders for large rugs have been successfully filled.

Early in 1930 the Quebec Provincial Government authorized the introduction of a new department and in October of that year the official opening of the Handicraft Department took place in Quebec. A magnificent collection of the craftwork of many nations was placed on view and a very fine School of Weaving and other crafts was inaugurated which has already proved of great value to the Province. Many pupils

have been taught and many teachers have been sent to outlying districts. The Guild is recognized as a sister organization and its cooperation is sought when it can be of use in this most important and extensive work.

It was not till 1933 that the Guild was able to open a Handicraft School. Weaving was naturally the first craft with which to open the classes, which have become popular and well attended. It is hoped to begin other craft classes in the near future as already people are asking for instruction in book-binding and pottery. Montreal has been behind large cities of other countries. But it should have its crafts school if it is to take its place as a fully equipped centre of cultural development.

The eastern provinces of Canada had their handicrafts while the west was still a wilderness. The west today teams with craftsmen of every sort, and Canada now shows her appreciation of the crafts that flourish from sea to sea, and will not allow the creative flame to perish with this generation.