

Making Industries of the Old Arts

How Canada is Providing Permanent Lucrative Occupation for Returned Soldiers Incapable of Strenuous Work

THE pioneer's prayer rug, that homely little patch of woven rags which the mothers of the Confederation fashioned for utility's sake, is manifesting a charm as potent as the Carpet of Bagdad in turning the dust of despair into gold for the disabled veteran of the Great War.

When the Military Hospitals Commission was created by the Government for the purpose of giving the returned soldiers the proper medical treatment to restore them to the best possible physical condition, and to provide the industrial education necessary to make them self-supporting members of the community, specialists were sent into the factories to make industrial surveys.

The Commission wanted to find out exactly what work men with various disabilities could be trained to do efficiently, that the courses in the vocational training schools which they were establishing might meet specific needs. For instance, they wanted to know exactly what opportunities there were for a one-armed man in the industrial world.

The results of the investigation were most encouraging. There were a surprising number of things which a man with one arm, or a legless man might do well. It was evident that he could be so trained as to command good wages and a steady job without drawing upon any one's compassion. For every man who came back minus a definite faculty it seemed that there were opportunities waiting in which their disabilities might be offset by training.

What to do with the men whose injuries had left them with permanently impaired health and the prospect of never being capable of working full days under industrial conditions was another question. Where could such a man be found suitable and profitable employment?

What business man could afford to employ him however much he might desire to?

To the vocational officers it seemed a problem without an answer until one day they came upon a circle of convalescent soldiers grouped around a little French-Canadian in the Grey Nuns' Convalescent Hospital in Montreal, where a large number of the "bed cases" among the soldiers are being cared for.

Propped up in his bed, he was working at a hand loom, a counterpart of the big one on which his old mother in the hills of the Gaspé country had woven all his clothes until he donned the King's khaki. To him it was no novelty but a means of livelihood which opened to him when he returned to the old home.

The cod fisheries and the land were now out of the question, but he could depend upon the wealthy tourists from the great cities to provide for his future. He remembered them as veritably begging the old pink lustre china from under his dinner, the candlesticks off the mantleshelf, the bed-spreads off the beds. They were

willing to pay any price for the homely hand-loom textiles which his women folks worked over in the winter firelight.

The Handicrafts Guild

BEFORE the war the Canadian Handicrafts Guild, an organization with headquarters in Montreal whose aim it is to foster these old peasant arts in the Dominion, had come into the district and bought up quantities of their stock of woven materials. They took their sheeting, their bedspreads, their towels, their woven rugs and even offered such undreamed of prices for their woollens that they stretched a point and sold their next year's gowns in the pattern. Although the strangers were offering only moderate market prices, the villagers were little used to ready money and it seemed a fortune to them.

Their commonest utensils threw the visitors into ecstasies. They little knew that they were a precious tag end of a century past, and a vein of pure gold in the eyes of the enthusiasts for peasant arts. They did realize, however, by dint of a thrift, which among other



Heroes of Flanders learning basketry during their convalescence in a Military Convalescent Hospital to keep their minds active and to ensure a means of future livelihood.

old-fashioned things they held a high virtue, that the strangers were anxious to have them weave more home-spun and rugs, and promised to buy all that they were able to turn out.

So the lad at the loom looked forward eagerly to the day when he should return and set up his own loom, and the vague hopelessness of the boys about him was incomprehensible.

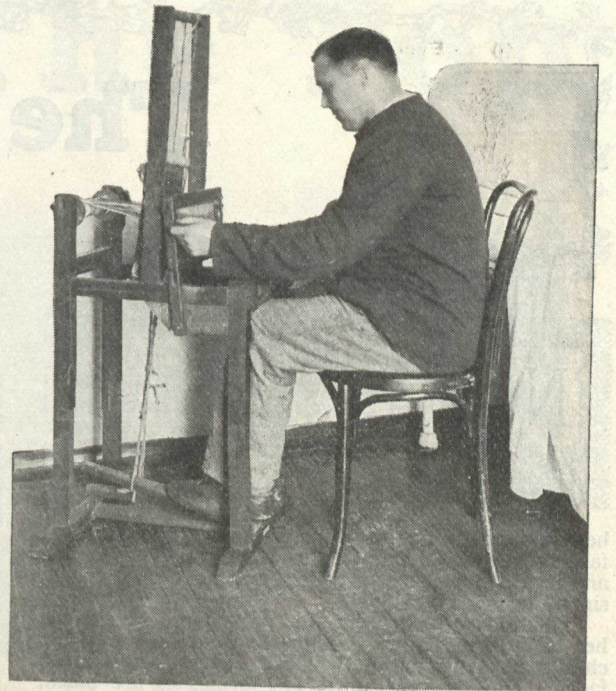
"Why don't you learn to weave, too?" he queried.

"Why not?" echoed the worried experts, and an idea was born which will lead to the development of one of the most artistic industries in Canada, a home industry.

The return for the labor is generous, and being an art as well as an industry, competition is not keen. The demand is always greater than the supply, and the worker can regulate his own hours, and determine his own surroundings.

The new idea was taken to Mrs. James Peck, for years president of the Handicrafts' Guild in Montreal, and a skilled craft worker, who had been giving her time for many weeks in directing the occupational work of the men confined in the military convalescent hospitals there.

She agreed that it was the very thing and carried the plan a step farther. The Handicrafts' Guild would only be too glad to have added workers in the field of peasant arts. The soldiers could



Convalescent soldier in a Montreal hospital learning to operate a hand loom. The loom turns out home-spun much in demand for clothing, hangings, etc.

be taught to make artistic textiles on the hand looms, rugs, and baskets and their products could be marketed in the same manner as the products of such peasant communities as the Gaspé villages.

Art Value of the Goods

THE art value of such goods, when brought before the people who are eager to secure them, is the chief consideration, and the demand is ever increasing.

Primitive simplicity gains in charm among those who have the most of the world's goods and can best afford to pay for their fancies, with every advance of the modern world. As appreciation grows apace with wealth, business grows with appreciation, and the future for the soldier who is trained to these handicrafts is assured.

In preparation, handlooms have been given the men to work at in their beds, and qualified textile workers are engaged in teaching them how to weave. Larger looms which turn out materials of greater width have been set up in the wards for advanced work, and weaving rugs on still larger looms will be taught as they progress.

The men are enthusiastic. A new hope is improving their condition and hastening recovery. Where gloom reigned before and the hands of the clock dragged, time passes too quickly now, and the place is bright with ambition. "Bed cases" are no longer a problem for the vocational officer.

"T. B." patients in the sanatoria established by the Military Hospitals

Commission will also profit by this arrangement. Many of these boys will never be able to engage in heavy labor again, but when the disease has been arrested they will be entirely capable of carrying on such work as this. Arrangements may be made that these men can live in communities in suitable climates and engage in some of the crafts, or return to their own families and set up looms. In this way they will earn perhaps more than they could in the cramped confines of the city, and enjoy infinitely better health and a longer life.

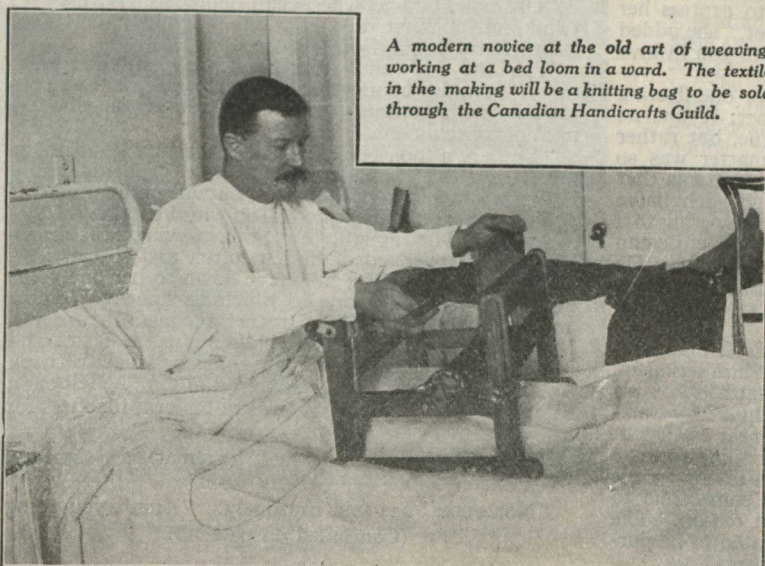
Modern education in tuberculosis has removed the prejudice against articles handled by such patients. The sanatorium trained man is known as the least likely man in the world to circulate germs.

Capt. R. T. MacKeen, the vocational officer for the Commission, under whose direction the plans have been completed, will allow no imperfect work. The boys know that they must turn out a marketable product to be sold on its merits and not for its sentimental association. The fact that a returned soldier made it is never known.

The men understand that such a ruling is made for their own good, since a demand artificially stimulated for the time being by the popular sympathy with a veteran is a poor business basis on which to place his future.

The aim of the Commission is to put every soldier who comes back from the front in a position to earn an honest living, independent of sympathy or philanthropic aid; to make him a necessary factor in some phase of industrial life where he will find a demand for his labor.

The cost of selling service is not taken from the profits of the cottage worker. No profits exacted for the Handicrafts Guild, which finds its reward in seeing the old crafts flourish.



A modern novice at the old art of weaving, working at a bed loom in a ward. The textile in the making will be a knitting bag to be sold through the Canadian Handicrafts Guild.