



# Dalton's

AMERICAN DECORATIVE ARTS



## THE CRAFTSMAN

"The lyf so short  
the craft so  
long to  
lerne"



The Craftsman was printed from October 1901 to December 1916 and was devoted to the American Arts and Crafts Movement. This month's reprint appropriately comes from the first issue of the magazine and explains the Stickley "Legend" (shown here to the left). [Reprint archives.](#)

**I**n the Middle Ages, that golden period of the arts and crafts, each master workman adopted some device or legend which, displayed upon every object of his creation, came finally to represent his individuality as completely as did his face or voice; making him known beyond the burgher circle in which he passed his life, and, after his death, becoming a magic formula, by which to conjure up his memory, even though the years had multiplied into centuries.

Among the legends so employed, the one assumed by Jan van Eyck, the early Flemish painter, has retained its force and point down to our own day. *Als ich kanne* (if I can) appears written across the canvases of this fourteenth century *chef d'ecole*, placed there, without doubt, as an inspiration toward excellence in that art wherein van Eyck became an epoch maker. Appearing in the background of his masterful portraits, it has something of defiance and humor, as if offering a covert challenge to less skillful limners.

The *Als ich kanne* of van Eyck, like the *Quand meme* on Sarah Bernhardt, reflects that sentiment of courage, boldness and persistency which appeals to all truly virile natures. Thus when William Morris, in his early manhood, visited the Low Countries, and there grew fired with enthusiasm for the decorative arts, he found this legend and made it his own. He used it, in French translation, first in tapestries designed for his own dwelling, and finally it became indented with him; so that the *Si je puis* now recalls his memory as vividly as do the designs which speak to us from the hangings of our walls, the tiles of our floors, or the covers of the books which lie upon our tables.



The same legend in its modern Flemish form, *Als ik kan* (if I can) has been adopted by the Master of the United Crafts. It here forms an interesting device with a joiner's compass, which is the most primitive and distinctive tool of the worker in wood. The legend is further accompanied by the signature of the Master of the Crafts, Gustav Stickley, which, together with the proper date, appears branded upon every object produced in the workshop of the Guild.

In this way, authenticity is assured, comparisons of progress are made possible, and every facility of information is afforded to the one who shall acquire the piece.



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