

ANNA SIMONS AND THE GERMAN SCRIPT MOVEMENT

THE end of the 19th century marks the beginning of a renaissance of German artistic craftsmanship. A desire arose that modern, beautifully formed and well executed examples of craftsmanship should match the works of painters and sculptors. Artists and talented craftsmen began to devote themselves successfully to the new task, but it did not at first strike anybody that script also combines both craftsmanship and art. Writing masters and clerks were fond of calling their work calligraphy, translating this foreign term by "The art of writing and lettering", but forgot that their work consisted merely of copies of printed models which, almost without exception, were not in harmony with German feeling and tradition and school teachers were expected to drill their pupils to conform their writing to these artificial models. Hardly anyone remembered how beautifully and legibly our grandparents had been able to write. The art of handwriting had deteriorated, and this was attributed to the introduction of the pointed steel pen, while in reality all feeling for proper letter forms had been lost. This is also noticeable in the printing type of the time. Scrolls and ornamentations disfigured the printed letters. It was forgotten that Gutenberg's founts were designed by calligraphers.

Rudolf von Larisch in Vienna was the first to show that Greek, Gothic, uncial and minuscule, cursive and current hands owed their impressive forms to a gifted hand and a suitable implement. The designing of letters requires artistic training and historical knowledge. This was probably felt by Anna Simons during her studies in England at a time when a discussion of such things was not yet feasible in Germany. She joined the Society of Calligraphers founded by Mr. Johnston, the members of which, belonging to various professions, were keenly interested in these questions. They studied fine old MSS. and tried to break away from the prevailing mode of script. In time a modern hand for every-day use was evolved quite naturally. The excellent reproductions of old MSS. from all periods, issued by the Palaeographical Society provided a basis for the study of script forms. William Morris' axiom of the unity of all art, applied art and script had fallen on fertile ground. Cobden-Sanderson printed exquisite books at his Dove's Press, and commissioned Edward Johnston, the leader of the English writing and lettering movement, to design written titles and initials for them. Johnston conducted the newly started writing classes at the Royal College of Art and the L. C. C. Central School of Arts and Crafts, and also at the Municipal Schools of Arts and Crafts in Birmingham under the directorship of Catterson-Smith. In these schools fine printing and binding was also taught. Pen-and-ink work and writing and lettering served to foster good taste and manual skill.

In Scotland, — for instance in Glasgow, — Robert Howie taught applied art beginning with a course of instruction in writing and lettering. A group of enthusiastic men and women collected, and in this group I found an opportunity to meet Anna Simons, who was a keen pupil of Edward Johnston's with a natural gift inherent in her family. She grasped at once her teacher's principle that anyone who wishes to make letters must make himself master of the tool, and that anyone who wishes to make fine books must bind them himself. Among this English group we used to have animated discussions about architecture, furniture, stained glass and design. Anna Simons had a sincere appreciation for English and Scottish Gothic comparing it with Gothic art in other European countries. Here her perception and her discernment of the spirit embodied in the different historic styles of script, became apparent and enabled her to reproduce Tudor handwriting and French, German and English Gothic scripts with pens cut specially to suit each variety. Her gift