AN ENGLISH SPINSTER AT WORK AT HER LOOM

HANDICRAFTS BACK IN ENGLISH PEASANT HOMES: BY ALICE DINSMORE

THE visitor to the North of England who begins his wanderings in the Lake district with the drive from Ambleside through the Langdales to Grassmere, has a succession of mild surprises. Along the winding roads, the ancient-looking stone bridges, the quiet meadows, the mirror-like tarns and the noisy waterfalls, are the gentler features, to which the mountains, bracken and heather clad at the foot, jagged and portentous at the summits, add the elements of grandeur.

At the hightest point, under the shadow of the Langdales, there comes a profound impression of solitude that is deepened as one descends to the gloomy Dungeon Ghyll. The spell of the loneliness of the region is still upon the traveler when he finds himself beside a tiny, one-roomed dwelling from which a littl girl appears.

She offers for sale bags and scarfs made of linen of the natural color, adorned with embroidery and lace. Very beautiful they look in this far away spot, and beautiful they really are. The linen of which they are made was spun in this bit of a cottage. For all about in this Langdale region the spinning wheel is again "murmuring" as in the days which were already passing when Wordsworth wrote his "Song for the Spinning Wheel."

It was in 1883 that Miss Marion Twelves of Elterswater, with the financial support of Mr. Arthur Fleming of the "Crag," Loughrigg, undertook to revive this industry. She had been impressed by Ruskin's theories in regard to the moral value of an industry that can be carried on in the home and participated in by every member of the family. The "Master," as Ruskin is called by those who follow most closely his teaching, deeply deplored the cessation of the wheel in the dale cottages.

Search was made for a wheel. It would have been easy to find one in New England, but not so in all Westmoreland. However, the search extended to the Isle of Man, and there a wheel was discovered and a skillful carpenter made fifteen copies.

Then Miss Twelves opened a school for would-be spinsters near her home in Elterswater. Needy women and girls came to learn, the wheels were distributed among them, and they began to work with flax brought from Belfast.

HANDICRAFTS BACK IN THE COTTAGE

IN three months enough thread had been spun to make a good-sized web. And then another search was begun—this time for a *loom*. Half a century had gone since a hand loom had been in use in the region. Among the cobwebs of a cellar in Kendall, the detached pieces of an old worm-eaten one were found and taken to Elterswater.

The story of its rehabilitation reads more like legend than history. When the village carpenter, aided by the advice of Miss Twelves and the parish priest, had painfully succeeded in patching together the fragments so that every part seemed to be in its place, the loom could not be worked—something was wrong. They were in despair. Suddenly Miss Twelves bethought herself of a photograph of Giotto's reliefs illustrating the art of weaving, on the Campanile in Florence. They studied that photograph—and the mystery was solved. The shuttle would fly, and Giotto, six hundred years in his grave, had set to going a loom in the Highlands of Briton!

The necessary warping frame was built; a bobbin winder was made; an old man who had once woven was engaged, and in the spring of 1884, the first piece of linen was finished.

After the industry had been going on eighteen months, a visitor wrote this about it:

"In this cottage—St. Martin's—are stored the bales of flax from Belfast which Miss Twelves divides into hanks and weighs out to the women who fetch it home to spin. Here, too, is the store of spun flax returned by the women, and the warping room, where the threads on the bobbins are prepared by Miss Twelves herself for their place in the weaver's loom.

"And, above all, hard by the house is the weaver's shed, and, what is worth going a hundred miles to see for the sake of the very old man, the weaver, who must have been at weaving when George III was King, and who has brought with him the dearest look of kindliness, purity, and industry, which makes his withered face beautiful."

Within the next five years Miss Twelves added instruction in embroidery and Greek lace to her curriculum, and they greatly enhance the beauty of the fabrics.

The spinners can earn on an average, between one and two dollars a week. Not much, we say, but their five or six shillings go further

than the same amount here, and make a very important addition to the family income, necessarily so meagre in this mountain region where the soil yields little except pasturage for sheep.

It took but a short time to prove that Ruskin and Wordsworth were right about the moral influences of spinning—the atmosphere of contentment has either come for the first time, or returned to those cottages with the wheel. Old rheumatic fingers that were almost useless can manage the distaff. Only those who have known the weariness of enforced idleness can realize the joy that has come to these women in the relief from the tedium which made the aching joints doubly painful.

SOME women were able to leave the dangerous and unsuitable employment of a powder factory. They can not earn as much spinning as they did in the factory, but they can look after their children; they can stop the wheel to cook the family meal and quickly resume it. Their husbands are better fed, and the family so much more economically and comfortably managed that, on the whole, they are better off than before.

And the intellectual life has also been quickened, for Miss Twelve organized spinster tea parties, where, now and then, the women who can come, meet, and in addition to the friendly gossip of the hour, they have the poets, or the "Master" of them all read to them, so that they go back with fresh thoughts to set to the rhythm of their wheels.

When Miss Twelves had seen the industry well started in Westmoreland, she essayed to do the same service for Cumberland. So she took with her a spinner from Langdale and set up a loom in connection with the Industrial Arts School at Keswick.

Last summer I saw her in her own quaint vine-covered cottage near Crossthwaite church, where she is now carrying on the industry independently. Over the door are the words, "The Ruskin Linen Industry." Over the mantel in the low room one enters first, is the "Master's" motto, "To-day." Here she now has a paying business. The mighty and noble have learned that her linen is every thread flax and untouched by acid dye or bleach; that it lasts and grows always more silky and beautiful. Her orders come from all over the Kingdom and beyond, from the royal family and

the rich plebian alike. An outgrown frock of Mr. Gladstone's little granddaughter Dorothy was there, sent as a sample for another web large enough for Dorothy the grown young lady.

The really sacred product of the loom and Miss Twelves' spinners, I saw in the Ruskin Museum at Coniston. It is a pall, spun, woven and embroidered by the loving hands under Miss Twelves' directions, which was laid over the coffin of Ruskin. It is exquisitely beautiful: In the center "To-day" is wrought in wild-rose pink, while embroidered at intervals all over the covering are his best-loved flower—the wild rose—the fallen petals, the buds, the full blown blossoms scattered over it, and the lining is the same shade of pink silk. For Ruskin, who loved color, who had his mother's casket covered with a light fabric, nothing could have been so fitting as this.

In those last years of Ruskin's, while the sands of life were running low, how comforting must have been the thought that his seeds of truth had so sunk into the hearts of some of his friends that they were bearing such fruit as this work of Miss Twelves!

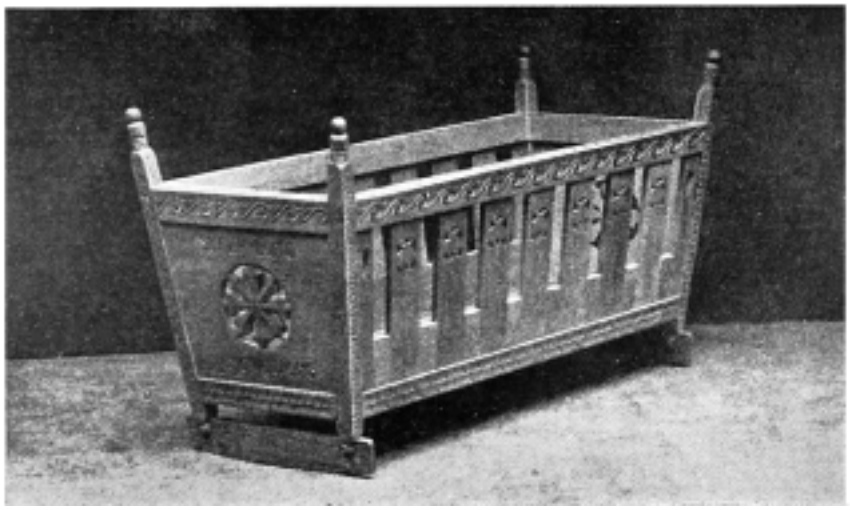
OTHER fruit of his teaching at Keswick is that begun by his one-time student at Oxford and constant friend, Canon Rawnsley. There in the parish house of the ancient church of St. Kentigern, he and Mrs. Rawnsley in 1883 opened evening classes in metal work for men and boys. Mrs. Rawnsley had acquired skill in their former parish at Wray, and was the first teacher. The winter evenings are long, and the visitors who give employment to many men in summer are an unknown factor there. And the mischief which Satan finds for idle hands had not been lacking in that hill-town. So Mr. and Mrs. Rawnsley found it a most suitable place to verify Ruskin's wholesome teaching:

"For the continual education of the whole people, and for their future happiness, they must have such consistent employment as shall develop all the powers of the fingers and the limbs and the brain; and that development is only to be obtained by hand-labor, of which you have these four great divisions—hand-labor on the earth, hand-labor on the sea, hand-labor in art, hand-labor in war."

The history of the growth of this industry is vividly interesting. To-day the institution is housed in a most picturesque stone building

PICTURESQUE HOME OF ONE OF THE MOST SUCCESSFUL WEAVING COMMUNITIES

MISS BAYLEY'S HOME AND WORKSHOP AT SHOTTERY



THE KESWICK SCHOOL OF INDUSTRIAL ART

CARVED CRADLE MADE AT THE KESWICK INDUSTRIAL ART SCHOOL

near the Greta. The winding stone steps, in a low turret leading up to the gallery and the entrance to the show-rooms, are covered with a luxuriant vine. This gallery is such an one as the spinsters spun in of yore along the Borrowdale road, at Hawkshead, and indeed generally in the Lake District. Below it is the legend:—

"The loving eye and skilful hand
Shall work with joy and bless the land."

The show-room is the place of chief interest in summer when the work almost ceases because the men must be otherwise busy. This cheerful room when I saw it, was fascinating in its array of metal repoussé work and wood carvings. Here were trays of copper with charming designs upon them, of every possible size and shape, jars and jugs and vases, silver and silver-lined alms dishes, altar crosses, ink-stands, soup tureens, tea table appliances,—these and other things in brass, all hand-made after original designs.

The carved woodwork is scarcely less beautiful—chairs, a cradle, chests, cupboards, cabinets, etc. The value of the output of the year is about eight thousand five hundred dollars, and advance orders are always on the books.

In winter evenings, the work-rooms below stairs are busy, happy places, with men hammering, blow-piping, and working at the anvil fashioning beautiful objects.

Two nights a week the rooms are quiet, for all the sixty members of the school are drawing and designing.

This "Keswick School of Industrial Art," as it is called, is on a substantial paying basis—has a name to live in the United Kingdom, —but this tells the smallest item in the story. These men and boys who had lived among the mountains, where ghyll and dale and tarn and tree lends each its charm, but had not seen the beauty, have had their eyes opened to the fair forms of Nature. They had known no better place to spend their evenings than the public house—drink was here (as where is it not?) the crying evil. Now all is changed. This is the most effective temperance agency in the place.

The director of the school never hears a coarse word, he sees refinement everywhere, and more—he sees true brotherliness. If a man gets some new shade of color, or degree of temper, or turn of form that others have not happened upon, he is ready to share what he has gained.

The wives speak with tear-dimmed eyes of the comfort and peace now in their homes—due to the school.

Canon and Mrs. Rawnsley are so ready to ascribe all this work "to the mind and spirit of John Ruskin," that it is no little satisfaction to another to say that both the Crossthwaite parish and strangers from afar, find in it strongest evidence of the wise and self-denying devotion of their rector and his wife to the physical, moral, and spiritual well-being of their people.

SOMEWHAT more than five years after Miss Twelves began her school in the North country, Miss Clive Bayley opened a school of weaving. She told me she had long felt that the simplest lessons in weaving learned by every child who attends a Kindergarten might easily have a sequence in practical work done by children of a larger growth. She had observed that many girls who lead lives first of wretchedness and then of immorality have strongly marked artistic temperaments. They have neither talent nor means, in most cases, to devote themselves to study in an art school. For such she would make an outlet through handicraft. So for years she developed her ideas at Bushy, near London.

Last March she took a life lease of a quaint cottage at Shottery, so that whereas in time past Anne Hathaway's house was the sole object of attraction in the quiet village, now there is a double reason why strangers should go there. Here last summer I had a delightful interview with Miss Bayley. The interior of her cottage is far more old-fashioned than the exterior—the rooms are tiny and low. The one where visitors are received is crowded with the work that has been done at the old school,—draperies, friezes, banners, scarfs, carpets and rugs are hanging and spread about, the colors and designs are alike beautiful and many of them are highly artistic. To her initiative is indirectly traceable the recent revival of an ancient art in Southern England, for almost under the shadow of the majestic Cathedral are now installed the "Canterbury weavers."

Generations had lived and died since weaving had been done in old Canterbury when Miss C. F. Phillpotts and Miss K. Holmes conceived the plan of resuscitating the industry. They were interested in the well-being of women and girls in the town, and so they sent a few of them to Miss Bayley's school, then in

Blenheim Street, London, to learn the art of weaving. When they had gained sufficient skill, they began with Swedish looms in a room in the High Street, Canterbury, to weave woolen for clothing. Very soon the good quality of their fabrics won purchasers for their goods and an independent industry was established, which three years ago moved into the present fitting quarters—the very house once occupied by Huguenot weavers. Though the building had been used in the intervening time for an inn, the present occupants found, in dark corners and crannies, bits of silk and wool, and parts of looms and bobbins that dated back two hundred years.

THE old house has been sufficiently remodeled within to make a comfortable and even spacious weaving room, while the overhanging roof and projecting windows, fringed with vines and blossoms both on the street and on the Stour sides, make the exterior fascinating beyond words.

About thirty girls now ply the shuttle here, producing dress goods in linen, cotton, and wool which, while they are of necessity more expensive than machine-made fabrics, are also far more durable.

What is true of both the institutions at Keswick, and of Miss Bayley's at Shottery, is true at Canterbury; there is no suggestion of factory life in the appearance of the workers, as there is none of the factory in the rooms where they work.

The girls look well and contented and talk with gentleness and intelligence. In their healthful, homelike surroundings, they have conditions calculated to stimulate their best efforts.

Beautiful and honest handiwork is being produced at all these places, and this can not fail of making its impression upon the thoughtful workers. And better far than this, the workers themselves are given not only a fair chance to live a cheerful and comfortable life, but to grow in mind and spirit.