

REVIVAL of ENGLISH HANDICRAFTS: The Haslemere Industries



Modern civilization prides itself on its power machinery and devices for saving labor and increasing production. Our own country leads the world in this class of inventive ability.

It is pleasant, therefore, to those who have feared that the hand might forget its cunning, to know that in the very midst of this busy factory life there are places where the old handicrafts of long ago are being re-established.

Quietly, through England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales, such crafts are getting a firm foothold. The advent of machinery and steam had well nigh crushed them out, but in far quarters almost inaccessible to the busy manufacturing centers and dependent on their own resources, the spinning wheel, the loom, the simple tool had never ceased, and were ready to be called into active work again.

For thirty years this revival has been slowly gaining force. Gradually a keen desire for a general renewal of the ancient handicrafts was felt.

Through the length and breadth of the British Isles, in small hamlets, in parish rooms, in distant lonely cottages, and even in great rushing London and Birmingham the hand began again to work with the old time tools.

Many interests united in this impetus toward handwork. Ruskin, Morris, Burne-Jones, and others, used their efforts for an art uplifting and joyful, where hand, heart and mind would work together; earnest women of the highest rank gave their influence to the movement to help increase the incomes of their poor tenantry; social workers called for handicrafts that the people might keep happy and employed in the home villages and not rush into the crowded cities; philanthropists saw herein the opportunity of giving the blessing of happy work to the lame, the blind, the aged who are obliged to pass the weary hours idly.

So widespread was the movement that a combined action of all of these workers was felt advisable, and about eighteen years ago the *Home Arts and Industries Association* was formed with its headquarters at Albert Hall, London. In this interesting Association are banded together handworkers of every description and aim. It may be but a class of a few little children making baskets in some lonely parish, or it may be an industry with its work placed on a businesslike footing, which asks for patronage not on account of the needs of infirmities of the workers but for the intrinsic value of the product. All are united, however, from the least to the greatest in creating higher ideals in the people, in making good conditions of labor, and in bringing happiness through interesting, useful handwork.

It is to the class known in the Home Arts and Industries Association as a "developed industry" (regularly competing in the open market) that the *Weaving and Tapestry Houses* of Haslemere belong.

A more ideal setting for a village industry, whose avowed purpose is to make good

hand-made materials under ideal conditions, could scarcely be found. In the southwest corner of Surrey, in a deep valley between wooded cliffs, is the little town which straggles picturesquely in winding lanes like wandering vines up the steep slopes. In summer, in the near distance, the eye traverses stretches yellow with gorse and broom, and purple with heather up to the high, dark ridge of Hindhead. On the top stands high against the sky the cross which marks Gibbet Hall, where the execution of a sailor's murderers once took place. Below the cross is a romantic lonely hollow called the Devil's Punch Bowl, around whose rim Smike and Nicholas Nickleby, as they were going from London to Portsmouth to seek their fortune, walked and read the description of the sailor's murder.

The atmosphere of Haslemere is artistic and literary. Here George Eliot lived on the Shotter Mill way, Tyndall built high on Hindhead and Tennyson's home looked out on the Blackdown. Artists and writers still gather here.

The village keeps its mediaeval appearance. The cottages of the people are low, with slanting tiled roofs. These ancient hand-made tiles of many varieties are well known to architects and antiquarians. The lanes are often so steep that the sidewalk is only on one side, while a high, abrupt cliff rises on the other. The sidewalk gradually ascends above the roadway and the cottages open on the sidewalk with a steep staircase descending to the road. This gives a curious and picturesque effect to the old stone cottages and the half timber houses with their overhanging stories. The workers in the Haslemere Industries live in such homes as these, surrounded from birth with charming nature and the simple artistic handwork of man.

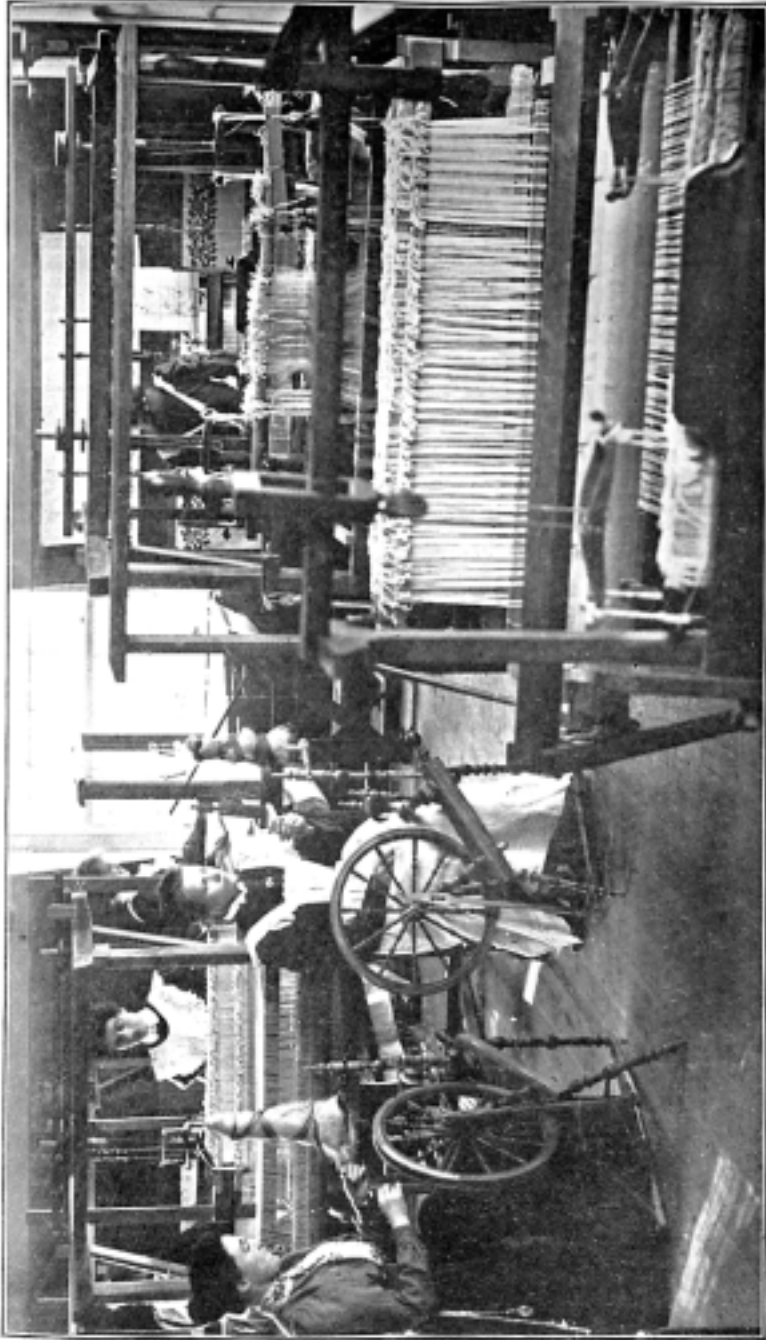
In only one instance does Haslemere leave its quaint, old-time life and become an ugly modern business village. From the railroad station deep

in the valley to the quaint little Weaving House modern factory conditions seem to struggle for a footing. Foundry Road is a paved street with work shops, stores and working men's houses crowding one another together. When the road begins to rise out of the narrow valley, the Weaving House and its close companion, the Tapestry House, stand as if to utter a protest and block the way against the farther march of ugliness. Beyond them the open valley stretches, the wooded hills show winding paths and the birds sing in meadow and copse.

In front of the Industries the road slopes upward, so that the buildings are partly below the level. Bridges swing across from the road to the second stories, and steps lead down to the ground floors of the buildings.

From the open windows of the Weaving House the steady click and thud of the looms and the whirr of the wheels are heard by passers-by. A sign hangs over the gate on the bridge bearing the name: "Haslemere Weaving Industry," and below, a placard bids visitors welcome.

More than eight years ago these industries were started that the village girls might have happy employment and remain in the fresh wholesome village life instead of drifting to London. It was felt by the public spirited founder, Joseph King, whose home was in their midst, that beautiful hand-made materials were needed and would have purchasers if the opportunity were offered. His confidence was justified. From a small beginning the industries are now well housed. Two workshops of two stories each, simple, attractive, adequate to the needs, are filled with happy, appreciative workers. The designer for both houses is Mr. Godfrey Blount, a well known artist. His wife is the inspiring director of the Tapestry House. The Weaving House is also under a capable manager, who goes in and out among her corps of workers, advising, di-



recting, assisting—sometimes at the spinning wheel, again at the loom over some intricate pattern which must be worked in by the hand rather than by the shuttle.

Each day has its visitors who have heard of the rare linen and cotton fabrics, and have often come long distances to see them. At such times the workroom is aglow with color, for out from deep carved chests and from high old presses are taken the woven stuffs, delightful in texture and harmonious in color, and hung up or thrown over tables. The materials are all handwoven and sometimes handspun. They are used for many purposes—hangings, table and sideboard covers, dress goods, etc. A revival of a beautiful old Scandinavian craft is seen in the pattern weaving, and simpler designs are made with treadle weaving. All have a distinct character of design which belongs to the Haslemere Industries.

The village girls can be seen at the looms making like materials. The warm colored walls and sloping ceiling make a constant sunshine within. Soft green window draperies obscure the too brilliant afternoon light which pours through the large windows.

The cheerful, healthful workrooms, the mediæval furniture of chests, presses, wheels, reels and looms, the bold fine coloring of the stuffs, the white aproned village workers, and the wide stretching meadows and steep hills of fair Surrey, as seen through the windows, are a pleasant picture of labor under ideal conditions.

The first floor of the Weaving House is used principally for the preparation of the warp. Here the village girls are at work at spinning wheels, spooling jacks, warping mill and warping frame.

The Tapestry House beyond has tapestry and rug looms on its first floor. Wool rugs with harmonious designs and colorings are a specialty of

this branch of the industry. Great stores of soft colored vegetable-dyed wools line the shelves on the walls. Welsh and Scotch cottages supply much of this material.

The second floor of the Tapestry House is devoted to "peasant tapestry," a rich linen applique work suitable for wall hangings and ceremonial uses, as well as for enriching materials for home decoration. This is like its sister, the weaving room, in its coloring. On the upper side walls Mr. Blount has wrought in gesso with his own hands fine characteristic designs. On shelves stand German and English hand-made pottery picked up by Mr. Blount in his journeys among peasant home workers. Rugs and applique embroideries, rich with traditional design, hang on the lower walls.

The same workers continue year after year. They have pride in their work and appreciation of it. As yet they do not carry out their own designs, though Mr. Blount would desire this if possible.

The spirit of the workrooms is happy, helpful, natural and industrious. Rush and worry are never present. Haslemere materials are to be found in use in the homes of the workers, showing their love for their handicraft.

The industries are self-supporting, though not yielding heavy revenues. The wages are not large, but, as it costs less to live in Haslemere than in London, the sum received is perhaps of equal value. The sales of material are continuous though not extensive. They have increased in amount in proportion as the English people have grown to appreciate the value of handwoven stuffs. They find their market in Haslemere in the daily visitor, and in London at the Peasant Arts Society, 8 Queen's Road, Bayswater W.; the Guild of Handicraft, 9 Maddox St., Regent; the yearly spring sale and exhibition of the Home Arts and Industries Association, and also, at times, at Liberty's.

From the designer and hand-worker, Godfrey Blount, Haslemere receives the inspiration which gives these hand industries their unique characteristics. Believing that the redemption of art must come from workers who, with loving touch, decorate useful things—be it only simple articles of every-day use—Mr. Blount himself lends his hand in all parts of the work. He does not expect every village worker to become capable of originating beautiful designs; he feels the creative imagination to be a rare gift. But he does successfully endeavor to cultivate among his band of workers an appreciation and spontaneous imagination which will inspire the hand to express itself in some way. That such work may give opportunity for higher aims, he would have pupils learn to draw and also to design. He would also have them study the traditions of art, not merely to copy the results, but to feel a sympathy with the spirit of art that in their hearts they may realize another's heart back of a design.

His own loving study of the past shows itself in his characteristic use of Coptic motives in the materials and in his book, "Arbor Vitae." He feels that the present revival of handicraft will mean little for art if it be but a philanthropic occupation for idle hours or a means of keeping people from the public houses. It must be the dawn of nobler conceptions of the charm of labor and of the unity of life. Workers everywhere must feel the happiness of impressing their own highest feeling on the objects they are making.

The success of the Haslemere Weaving and Tapestry Houses is drawing other hand-workers to Haslemere. On the hills far back in the copse a wheel, warping frame and loom are at work in the hands of an artistic charming woman. Cheerily she makes soft, clinging cotton and linen materials in pure white or with the delicate coloring of pale sunset skies, such fabrics as the Greek matron would have delighted to

use for *chiton* or *peplos*, or with which the Church could deck its altars.

On a high terrace looking down on Haslemere a small kiln has been built. Another worker, long connected with one of the noted potteries in Southern England, is now working out his own designs on hand-made tiles.

Across the narrow valley, an artist and designer of long experience has secured a simple little building. During the summer Mr. Hooper was busily at work putting hand looms in place and setting up the mysterious cobwebs of the Jacquard harness. By this time exquisite brocades with wonderful designs carried out in pure silk and threads of precious metals are coming from the little shop.

These hand industries of Haslemere seem to prophesy a new birth of art. Throughout Great Britain hundreds of villages are quietly working at like crafts. Cottages once poor and dismal are becoming prosperous and happy.

In America, too, we have a few such garden spots where the hand is employed in noble work. Deerfield and other places are raising in us the appreciation of true workmanship, for, in the words of the Duchess of Sutherland, who has worked successfully in the far Northern Highlands and Islands of Scotland for the return of the old handicrafts,

“Men’s eyes see again,
Men’s minds live again,
Men’s hands fashion again.”

