

# Editorial

THE tools of the craftsmen have always evidenced great diversification and inventiveness; but the question exists as to how the tool affects the artistry of the craft. The answer is obscured, but there seem to be indications that good tools and well-prepared working materials can count for much in artistry. Innate genius and patience have often surmounted the obstacles of clumsy tools and crude materials; but more often the quality of the tool and the material have enhanced the beauty of the finished piece.

As an example of craftsmen building on patience there are the weavings of Peruvians of the Pre-Incan period. These gorgeous weaves are in yarns spun to gossamer weight, so fine that they can be hardly duplicated by the most complicated machinery of the modern spinning mill. Yet the Peruvian craftsmen probably had the crudest of hand-spinning frames. For craftsmen working with efficiency and inventiveness we have the wonderful school of metal workers that plied their craft in Medieval Germany. They carried the metal

arts further than other races, had the best equipment, and produced the most gorgeous examples of the art.

Perhaps race has had much to do with the relationship between the tool and the artistry. Primitive

races like the Indians compensated for their mechanical failings with extraordinary patience and a capability of creating aesthetically beautiful things in simple design conceptions. The European, with his Egypto-Greek background, tracked another path. Our ancestry has funded us with a scientific bent that reaches into our arts. Also we have leaned towards natural forms which require more finesse, delicate lines, and diverse color. Our tendency has been towards specialization, and throughout history we find that craft centers flourished, carving reputa-

tions for themselves in beauty of product coupled with greater skill in producing. Their productive ability lay as much in the quality of the materials used and the efficiency of the tools as in the power of their hands. Florence was famous for woolen



GREECE

*Spinning in the most primitive way is still a familiar sight in the interior of Greece*

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*Publishers' Photo Service, N. Y.*

U. S. A. — ARIZONA —  
CANYON DE SCHELLY

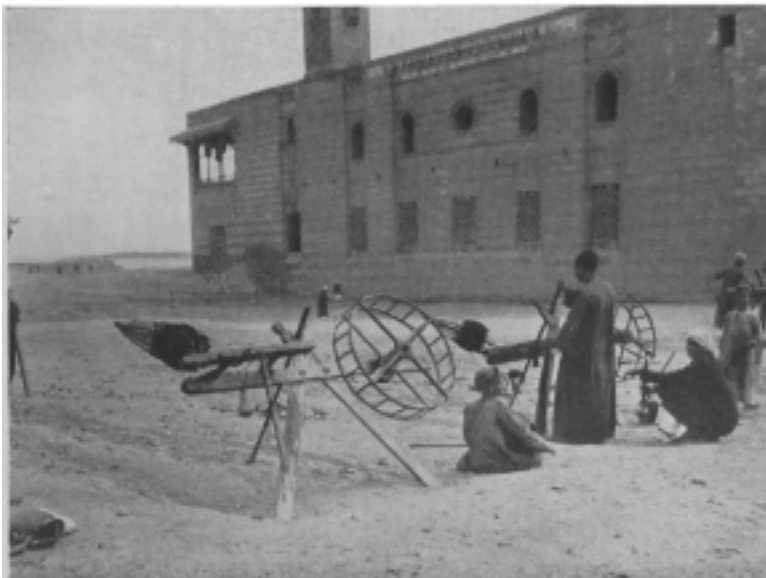
*A Navajo girl weaving a rug. Notice the design at the bottom of the weave. Time is no object; each strand of the weave is hammered close by a curved hardwood stick. The better the weave, the closer and heavier the finished product*



CZECHOSLOVAKIA

*Weaving cloth in one of the rural homes*

*Publishers' Photo Service, N. Y.*



EGYPT — CAIRO

*Natives spinning yarn*

*Publishers' Photo Service, N. Y.*

cloths, having closely guarded secrets on finishing; Nuremburg was a center for the metal craftsmen creating works in metal that made the fifteenth-century burgher wonder how human hands could produce things so delicate and beautifully finished; the Gobelin works of the eighteenth century wove tapestry that were miracles of color because they had made such rapid strides forward in the chemistry of dyeing.

At the Cheng Te Chen works in China were produced history's most exquisite porcelains. These immense works were a hive of industry and comparable to the extensive ceramic factories of today; undoubtedly they were efficient, as skilful in the cleaning of the clay, as able in the grinding of colors; science was at their elbow yet their products suffered in nowise.

The history of Navajo blanket weaving furnishes an interesting sidelight on the value of good working materials. The finest blankets are the so-called "Bayeta" type woven of yarn ravellings from Spanish broadcloth. The Indians, with their lack of skill and crude equipment, were never able to spin such soft, lustrous yarns as were contained in the Bayeta cloth, and with their home dyes could not create such exquisite colors. The inability to secure this cloth and the importation of the poor Germantown yarns gradually brought retrogression to the glorious art of blanket weaving and thwarted the artistic expression of a gifted people.

The right tools and good working materials have always been of advantage to craftsmen though they do not necessarily lead to beautiful work. The most exquisite of our ivories are Byzantine and Romanesque — ivories that were probably fashioned with clumsy tools. The artistic genius of the craftsmen, however, overcame the handicap of the tool. These early craftsmen had genius in design and confined their efforts to simple motifs that did not require fine cutting. Their simplicity of design was the happy medium for ivory, and with all the skill displayed by later craftsmen in cutting ivory there has never been an equal display of artistic genius.

The comparative importance of the tool to the

craftsmen has come in the forefront with the advent of the machine age. In the past inventiveness in the crafts was accepted without question; now we pause and ask if we are not simulating the machine. Many craftsmen would have us shy away from the improved tool and revert to primitive methods. To adopt this course is to stifle progress. If the craftsmen of the past were helped by improved tools, so can we aid ourselves so long as we make our efficiency subservient to our artistic bent.

Countries like Germany and France are making tremendous forward strides in the development of crafts; much of their success has come from clever adaptation of scientific methods. In England there has been a tendency to revert to the past in design and method; but a comparison of modern English work with that of Continental craftsmen leaves England far in the background so far as enterprise and aesthetic ability are concerned. The Continental craftsmen have succeeded in making their arts a part of modern life, using invention, new materials, departures in design, to achieve this happy result. German craftsmen are producing glass that is equal to the finest of Bohemian, Chinese, or Roman productions; their success lies in the adaptation of every scientific advance to their craft. In France, Rodier is creating fabrics that are equal to the gorgeous brocades and velvets of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

These craftsmen have found that they can adhere to craft standards and yet utilize invention and technical aids. So can we, for our goal should be the development of flourishing crafts with no thought of comparison in a past. We cannot live a double life that would enable us on one side to be a citizen of this hurrying, scientific world and on the other be steeped in the centuries gone by. Just as the Continental craftsmen are utilizing a modern age and remain great craftsmen, so can our workers attain a similar goal if our mood is receptive and our ideals right.

*Editorial Note.* — The tapestry illustrated on cover page is the "Flight into Egypt," woven by the famous Swedish weaver, Sara Mattsson.

