

Wood Weaving.

We take the following details concerning a very peculiar industry from a recent number of *Cassell's Magazine*: One of the busiest towns of the manufacturing district of the Austrian empire is Ehrenberg, lying close to the Saxon frontier, and distinguished from other towns and villages for its curious industry of wood weaving—*sparterie* work, as it is called—which was introduced something more than a century ago by a carpenter named Anton Menzee. The threads used for weaving are no thicker than writing paper, and vary in width from one-fifth to the twenty-fifth part of an inch. The aspen is the only tree whose wood is sufficiently tough and pliable to supply these threads in the required lengths. This tree was formerly indigenous to Bohemia, but has now almost entirely disappeared, so that the raw material for the *sparterie* work has to be brought from Russian Poland. The wood used for the purpose of weaving must be free from knots, as the smaller defects or irregularity, such as ordinary persons would hardly notice, make the fibers quite unfit for working. Arrived in Ehrenberg, the wood is planed and divided into pieces nearly $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide. When these have been made perfectly smooth, they are divided again by an instrument resembling a plane, but furnished with a number of fine knife blades, which mark the wood at regular distances, according to the width the strips are to be. This process requires the utmost dexterity and nicety, as it is absolutely essential that the divider shall exactly follow the direction of the fiber, and for this reason, among others, it must always be done by hand.

The divider makes incisions one-fifth of an inch deep; the wood is then carefully planed and comes off in thin paper-like strips, some of them not wider than a stout thread. They are gathered up by women as they fall, and are examined and the defective pieces rejected. There is a good deal of waste in the process. The threads or fibers being ready, must be tied in couples at one end before they can be woven. This work is done by children of four years of age and upward, who earn eight cents a day. The weaving is done chiefly by women, and on looms which differ considerably from those in ordinary use, the fiber being not more than 39 to 50 inches in length. The longer fibers form the warp and the shorter the woof, which are passed in and out by means of a little instrument with an eye like a needle. Until within a few years this concluded the whole process—the “foundations,” as they are called, were complete, and nothing more was done except that a few hats and caps were made of them. These were of the simplest description, and anything but becoming; moreover, they were glued together, thus making them unpleasant to wear in hot or wet weather; accordingly they brought but 30 or 60 cents per dozen, and were worn by the very lowest classes.

Within the last few years, however, owing partly to the interest taken by the government in the manufacture, a great change for the better has taken place. At present Ehrenberg sends out not only the raw material, but ready-made goods—fashionable hats of all kinds, and a variety of fancy articles skillfully concocted out of the wood fabric; ladies' hats of every description and of the latest fashion, such as no one need be ashamed to wear, are made entirely of wood, and sold at astonishingly low prices. Men's hats are to be had of all shapes, from the Panama hat—not a whit inferior to that bought in Paris—to the common hats exported in large quantities to China, and the linings or foundations of which give stiffness to the fez of the Turkish soldier. The export trade embraces all Europe, from Spain to Russia, extends beyond the Cau-

casus to India and China, and maintains active relations with North and South America as well as Australia. The manufacturers are in direct communication with the four quarters of the world, and their goods are being introduced into Africa by French and English traders.