



THE *Handbook* of the South Kensington Museum mentions that manufactories of tapestry had existed in England before the sixteenth century, "but no record has been kept of any English looms prior to this date." The earliest recorded English loom for tapestry weaving is the one at Weston, in Warwickshire, to which the Kensington volume assigns the date of 1509, probably too early, considering that the founder of the factory was William Sheldon, who died an old man in 1570. He had

**A Piece of Old  
Warwickshire  
Tapestry**

sent a weaver, Richard Hickee, of Barcheston, to study the process in Flanders, and to bring back artizans for his looms. On some of the pieces executed at Weston are armorial bearings, which enable us to say that the looms were at work up to 1650 certainly, and probably still later, but on the death of William Cheldin's grandson, Ralph, in 1684, it is most likely that the manufacture was discontinued. The best known products of this establishment are the famous tapestry maps of English counties, three of which are in the Museum



SIXTEENTH CENTURY ENGLISH TAPESTRY AT SUTTON COLDFIELD

## Notes

at York, and fragmentary pieces of two more in the Bodleian Library at Oxford. It is, however, well known that many other subjects were executed at Weston, as, for instance, the "Four Seasons" at Hatfield, which the late Sir W. Franks pronounced to be unquestionably some of Hickes's work. That other specimens are in existence is almost certain, and the one of which an engraving now appears is probably one of them. It has suffered by neglect and by injudicious treatment, but it has enough of the character of the unquestionable work of the Barcheston school.

The picture itself measures about 8 feet square, but the border, 15 inches wide, which originally surrounded the subject, has been cut off at top and bottom to widen the sides, so as to adapt it to the room in which it is now placed. This was probably done at the time when its owner removed from Castle Bromwich to Sutton Coldfield. The subject is one which I have seen in other pieces of tapestry, Queen Esther kneeling before King Ahasuerus, who is stretching forth his royal sceptre (Esther v. 2). The costume of the figures is a mixture of the "Eastern shape," in which the king is arrayed, and the finery of the Elizabethan era—fancy costume such as we meet in pictures of the period. In fact, there is no room for doubt of its being the genuine design of a sixteenth century artist.

But when its history is examined we find vivid traces of its Sheldon origin. The still existing house of Castle Bromwich was built in the latter end of Queen Elizabeth's reign by Edward Devereux, son of the first Viscount Hereford, and one of James I.'s baronets. He was a connection of the Sheldons, whose old manor, from which they derived their name, closely adjoins Castle Bromwich, and by gift

or purchase would naturally seek to ornament the new house with the produce of his kinsman's looms. In 1657, however, the estate was purchased by the son of the Lord Keeper Bridgeman, and at this period a family resided in the immediate neighbourhood (claiming descent from Sir Ralph Sadler, the diplomat of Henry VIII.'s reign), of good standing, named Sadler, who afterwards removed to Sutton Coldfield, bringing with them this piece of tapestry.

It is much to be regretted that it was cut when the move was made in the eighteenth century, and still more so that the lower part of the piece has suffered from damp. The room in which it is now fixed is very badly lighted, and only a very skilled photographic artist like Mr. J. H. Pickard could have successfully dealt with the difficulties it presented.