
MASTER WEAVER

BI-MONTHLY BULLETIN FOR HANDWEAVERS

Z-HANDICRAFTS - FULFORD - P.Q. - CANADA

May, 1958

No. 7

SHORTCUTS

HOW TO WEAVE EASIER AND FASTER

It is not for the first time that we approach this subject. In the early days we had a long article about the skill in handweaving. Then from time to time we wrote about this and that - selvages, shuttles, lease rods, looms, etc. In our "Modern Weaver" we have published several basic lessons of practical weaving. All this had in view to make weaving easier - for that matter as easy as professional handweaving of the 18-th century.

We are sorry to say it, but our "modern" methods of weaving are extremely difficult from the practical point of view. Weavers use too much time and too much energy to perform the simplest operations. How true is this statement proves the following story:

Some time ago, advertising our weaving courses, we have asked our readers a few simple questions:

1. Do you want to make a long warp and beam it in less than one hour?
2. Do you want to thread a loom without making mistakes?
3. Do you want to weave a running yard of cloth in 30 minutes?

We have received hundreds of enquiries. But it turned out that most of the readers understood that these courses of lessons are given by correspondence, in case one cannot attend them personally. This made us think.

Is it really possible to teach practical weaving by correspondence? To find the answer we can only try.

Incidentally we have also received one or two abusing letters, which implied that we are trying to get customers by false pretense.

These letters were significant. They mean that there are weavers who so completely lost touch with real weaving that they cannot believe any more that it still exists.

We have seen all a weaver who grasps the shuttle from above, opens the shed with the greatest effort, tries to approach it cautiously; then stops two inches from it as if he had changed his mind, finally closes his eyes and throws the shuttle. He pulls the beater forward slowly as if afraid that it will break, and holds it tight, changes the shed by gripping with his left foot in the dark and hoping for the best. Then releases the beater and beats once more for good luck,

Whose fault is this? Surely not the weaver's, who can hardly enjoy this sort of torture.

First of poor equipment, but often also of poor instruction.

We have warned our readers many times that the question of selecting a loom is of the greatest importance, and that it can decide about the whole weaving career of a beginner. Nevertheless human nature being what it is we are always inclined to defend our particular loom worthless as it is, rather than to confess that we made a mistake. We must absolutely get rid of this habit if we are to get anywhere with our weaving. This is the first condition of success.

Then many weavers follow completely wrong or obsolete methods simply because they have learned them from somebody who went for a trip to Sweden, or because they were described in a very good book.

What we must remember is that conditions change, and that a method which was perfect in other times and other countries is often of no value to us. For instance in countries where labour is very cheap it does not matter that a warp is prepared during "several days by several persons" (quotation from a well known book). But where on earth are we going to find several helpers and keep them at home several days every time we make a new warp?

Even in the otherwise excellent book of U.Cyrus we have a picture of warping in which at least four weavers are engaged, and two of them serve as dead weight apparently sliding on the floor.

Let's not always look up to the "traditional" weaving countries. Their equipment was expensive but the labour cheap, when here it is just the opposite. For instance the vertical warping reels used nearly

everywhere in central Europe are an insult to the human intelligence, nevertheless they are made and sold simply because they "must" be good if they are of Scandinavian origin. Well, they are not!

On the other hand if we look back to the times and countries where handweaving was done on an industrial scale, we shall find solutions to nearly all our problems. Because even cheap labour had to be used without waste in a competitive society.

A professional weaver of the 18-th century could weave for hours with a speed of some 50 picks per minute on a full size warp. This means from one to two yards per hour. On a narrower warp the speed could be much greater - perhaps 3 yds per hour. Those who do not believe can figure it out. If the weaver prepares a large number of bobbins or quills, and does not need to get up from the loom every 5 minutes, he can make on a warp of 15 inches 80 picks per minute, which means 4,800 picks per hour. If the fabric is coarse (10/2) cotton with 24 picks per inch, he made 200 inches or more than 5 yards in one hour!

Granted that a speed of 80 picks per minute requires a long training, But anybody can do half as much if everything works well, if the bobbins are properly made, the warp does not break, etc. It means that in our times when 24 picks per inch are considered normal, anybody can weave 2½ yds per hour. Thus our claim, if anything, was on the conservative side.

One may object that such fast weaving is exhausting. Nothing of the sort. Weaving at top speed may be exhausting, but normal speed is less tiring than slower work. Always provided that the equipment is adequate.

Some of our weavers may have another objection: Yes, but these old timers were using flying shuttle. - Not necessarily, and even if they did, flying shuttle was invented primarily for wide fabrics, and not for speed. When we weave cloth 56" wide the difference in speed between a hand shuttle and a flying one is remarkable, but on a narrow fabric there is none.

In all we have simply no excuse for our slow and laborious weaving. And this is why we publish this new series of articles about "shortcuts". In the next issue we shall start with the loom.
