



QUALITY OR CHARITY — On What Basis Should Weaving be Offered for Sale?

Dear Chasey:

Ran into something today which, in a way, I wish you could have seen. A friend of ours, knowing Mary's interest in weaving, asked us to go with her to a craft sale which included handwoven articles.

Our hostess met us at the door. "I'm *so* glad you could come. We have perfectly *lovely* things this year. *Do* come in and make yourselves at home."

Our friend mentioned that Mary and I were interested in weaving.

"They're interested in *weaving!*" our hostess squealed to the room at large. "*And* this little *child!*" Mary winced, but there was nothing I could do to protect her against this adult world. "Do you make pot holders, dear? I think they're *such* fun . . ." Had we had mumps we couldn't have been more conspicuous, but, since, by then, everyone in the room knew we *were* interested in weaving, we started looking around, while our hostess told us about the people who had done the weaving. "But *you're* interested in *weaving!*" she said. "Do come and see these *lovely* place mats. They're new this year."

We looked, and turned quickly to a rack full of towels, hoping our indifference to the place mats wouldn't be noticed. There were lots of towels, and they held us for a minute, but we soon found ourselves staring aghast at a coarse, drab, bureau scarf, woven in the most common four-harness overshot pattern. Our hostess seemed to sense our lack of words, and came to the rescue. "That's the old Whig Rose pattern. It's *always* good. We have it *every* year. It's a *very* old pattern." Mary was mumbling something about eight-harness looms. "May I go outdoors and wait?" she whispered.

Next we looked at some summer bags. "They can be thrown right in the washing machine," said our hostess. "They're *so* practical." (But they hadn't been washed before they were made up. . . .)

Finally we reached the dining room where the "really *fine* linen" was displayed on table and sideboard. "*These* are new this year, too! They come in all different colors. And they're *real* linen, too!" They hadn't been washed either. I thought of the surprise lying in store for the purchaser of the mats. How the whole field of finishing handwoven articles would open up for him with the first washing!

I felt socially cornered. Obviously we were expected to

buy something, for it was, fundamentally a very worthy "cause." But, look as I would, I could find nothing I wanted to encourage. Just as I had about decided that, come what may, I was going to be rude, my eye fell on an iron trivet on the floor beside the fireplace.

In my relief I spoke without thinking. "*That I like!*"

My trivet paid for, I started for the door. "I'm so glad you could come and your little girl, too. I can't get *over* your being interested in *weaving*. It must be *such* a nice hobby."

We fled.

With reservations, I wish you could have been there!

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "McGad".

Dear McGad:

Your letters make me tear my hair . . . I almost wish you'd forget about weaving while you're away . . . thank heaven I *wasn't* with you! I have seen so many of those things that I am heartily sick of them, and my heart aches for the poor people who have the actual doing of them. The weavers themselves are not responsible for the wretched things you saw. It all goes back to the horribly low standards which exist in so many fields today.

It isn't any more difficult to weave the good thing than the poor, and it isn't any more difficult to *teach* the good thing than the poor, but you do have to spend a few minutes determining *which* you want to do,—and an unossified imagination helps. And before weaving can be taught it must be understood. I'm quite sure that it is far more satisfying for the doer to accept payment for quality than to accept charity for lack of quality, which is what the sale you went to represented. My basic concern is for the doer, and what the doing of a thing does for him. You have never threaded up a four-harness loom to a Whig Rose pattern, but it is a terrific job in comparison to many other weaves, and the threading of it for the fiftieth time must be an appalling experience! And yet, actually, each threading of the loom *can* be a marvelous adventure. Overshot is a two shuttle weave which in itself makes it confusing for beginners, and the fact that mistakes do not show clearly is reason enough for beginners to ignore it. There are many one shuttle weaves which are far more simple, and offer many possibilities for more interesting results. The possibilities in a loom are limited *only* by the attitude of the weaver. In this case, I

feel that the attitude was established and fostered by the teachers and the group who hired the teachers. And the results show up the weakness of that attitude. And they alone are not to blame either, for after all, they had teachers, too. We have been living in a machine age, at a pace which makes it difficult for us to assimilate either the past or present. We feel the urge to use our hands, but have lost track of the fact that we need to use our heads in conjunction with them. The desire and need to use our hands is from a habit too deep-rooted in Time to be broken by a mere two or three centuries, but in that time we have become so used to depending on the machines that we are apt to overlook their limitations. To go beyond the machine remains the prerogative and responsibility of Man.

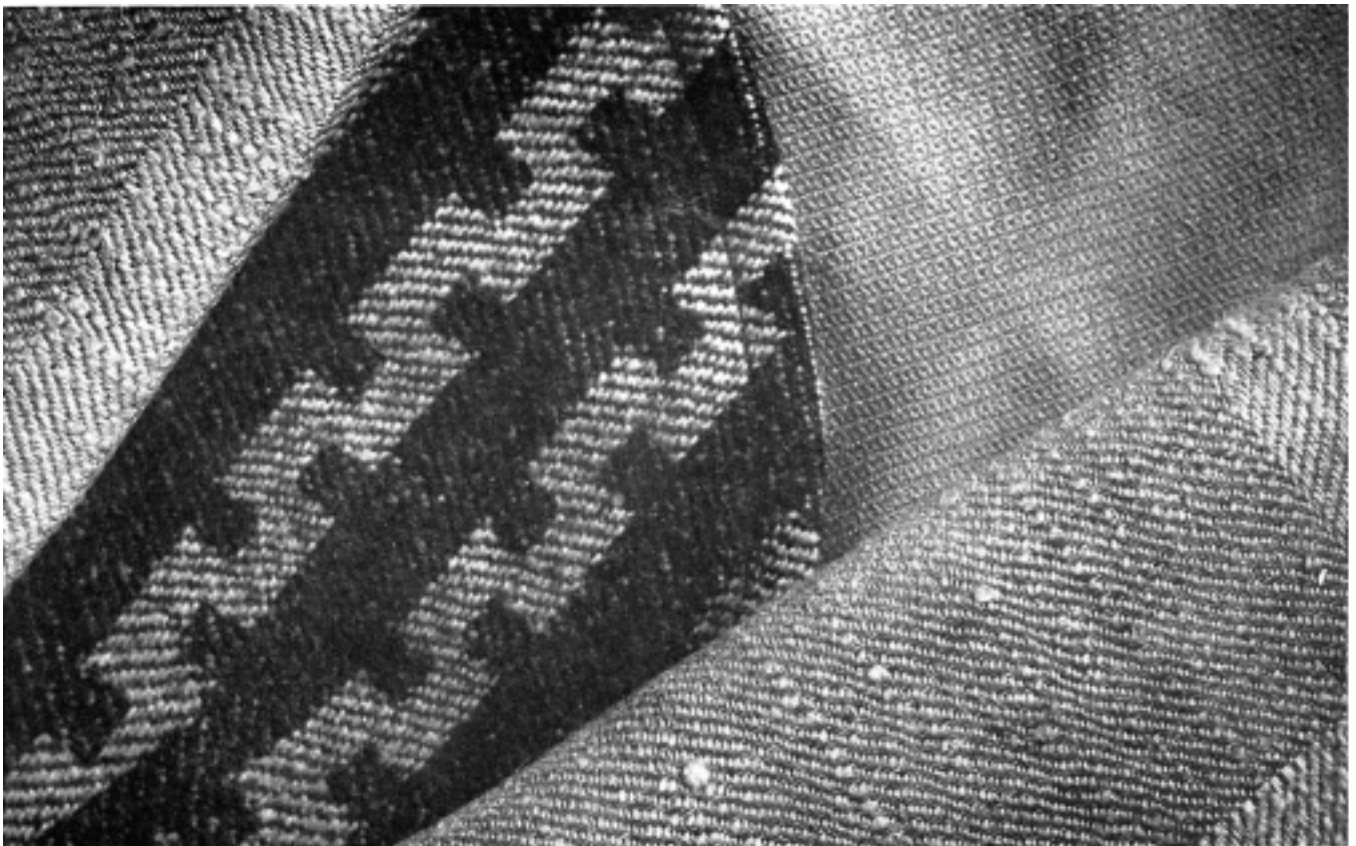
As you know, for a long time I have been very much interested in hospital patients, and therefore in occupational therapy, and yet I cannot help feeling that sometimes the meanings of those two words are lost. "Occupational" is merely an adjective modifying the word "therapy," but when one sees some of the results, it is hard to see how any therapeutic value could have been derived from the doing of it. It seems, rather, to be hastily planned "busy work." The need for the use of hands is recognized, but until it is more generally recognized that the brain should be used with them, the results will continue to be bad. And what doctor is going to be really interested in panty-waist crafts, and ladylike "occupations"? In all too many instances, the

standards of the craft are abysmally low, through no fault of the poor chap who is doing them. Often he is given not only poor and unimaginative instruction, but poor tools as well—a depressing combination. Unfortunately, he has no way of changing all this for himself, and must depend upon the institution for his tools, and upon his instructor for his plans for the use of them. I wonder if the variations possible on an eight-harness straight twill threading are generally known . . . This is the simplest of all threadings, and in my binders I have over 800 shed drafts for this threading alone! This means that over 800 *different* fabrics could be woven on one warp on one loom, or over 800 looms could be set up with this one simple threading, and each loom then used to produce a different fabric . . . And these 800 variations do *not* include the variations that could be developed by using different combinations of yarns. What this could mean to the busy instructor is too obvious to point out, and I cannot help feeling that there is far greater therapeutic value to be derived from an inch of an interesting fabric such as these variations suggest, than from ten yards of the dismal dish towels all too often woven in our hospitals.

And what happens to the poorly planned products turned out by these patients today?

In many cases, they are put on sale by the institution, and bought, for the most part, by charitable women who can afford in this way to bolster their own feeling of security

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Three fabrics, all woven in double-faced twill, using different fibers. A one-shuttle weave, double-faced twill, logical in threading and weaving, is considered by the Gadred Weavers as the simplest for beginners. Upper left and lower right, slub linen place mat with warp of linen handspun by Mary Terry in Coeyman's Hollow, New York, more than 100 years ago. Center, "black sheep bolero" of natural black wool on a natural light warp from Gadred Weavers' own sheep. Upper right, fine cotton twill made by weaver of only a few months' experience.

THE GADRED WEAVERS — QUALITY OR CHARITY?

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(a word I hate), and who, in turn, will give the distasteful object away as soon as a recipient can be found. This, in itself, is bad for everyone.

In the first place, the man who makes it feels within himself that the thing he is doing is not good. He needs no one to tell him this, he senses it because he has an unsatisfied or empty feeling. There is a standard within each one of us, and to produce something below that standard gives us this sense of failure. It is bad for the institution which holds the sale, for they know, when they stop to think about it, that they are asking far more than the article is worth, and that in the final analysis there is little difference between their act and thievery, except that, in this instance, the Robin Hood myth is attached to it. It is equally bad for the purchaser. The expense is probably of minor consequence, but she again senses that she has encouraged something which in itself is not good, and she also knows down deep inside that perhaps her more honest feeling is not one of generosity, but, rather, is one of self-satisfaction because in this way she has unburdened herself to a slight degree of the feeling of responsibility that accompanies being a little more fortunate than the next fellow.

Again, the blame does not rest on the man or woman in the hospital, any more than it rests on the weavers whose work you saw the other day. The fault lies solely with the teachers, and those who trained and employed the teachers. The crafts are not lost, time is still on our side, and if we look beyond—such a little way beyond—our immediate limits, we can uncover craftsmanship which is almost unsurpassed. Materials may have changed, we may not be able to weave the fine linen of ancient Egypt today, but the essential knowledge of the basic crafts still exists, and the possibilities in working with today's materials are practically limitless. To me, the ignorance on the part of many handweavers is hard to excuse. The knowledge has been preserved throughout the world for centuries without number, and although the custodianship of that knowledge has, to a large degree, passed into the hands of the power loom people, it is still available to us today, and it has been enriched by what the power looms have contributed to it. I cannot stomach the handweaver who thinks he is something special because he does it by hand! Handweaving can be beautiful, far more beautiful, I think, than anything yet done by a machine, but the mere doing of it by hand does not make it beautiful. Machines cannot duplicate the beauty of the brocades from Damascus, and yet, if something can be done better by machine, by all means we should let the machine do it! The planning, the respect for and knowledge of the tools and materials, the historical aspect of the craft, the human element, all these things contribute to the beauty of the woven article. All this the power loom people know, and the handweavers will have to recognize, if they are going to do good weaving.

Were the standards to be raised, the individual pursuing

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the craft would gain immeasurably. He would have a purpose which under the present standards he lacks, and he would be constantly striving to improve his technique. The institution would gain, because the integrity would be beyond question, and the sales would be larger because of the quality of the products. Mrs. So-and-So would buy something because she really wanted it. Since she bought it because she really wanted it, it would remain in her home, a proud example of what "her" hospital was capable of producing

This has completely run away with itself, but now you know how I feel about quality vs. charity!

Chasey

Finishing Handwoven Materials

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After mending and improving the weave as much as possible you are ready for scouring and fulling. At this point we feel that we should go into some detail in order to be sure that you know what fulling is and why it is done. Some people speak of fulling or felting as though they were the same thing. While you may get a little felting in the operation of fulling you certainly do not full with the idea of felting. Fulling means just what the word implies—to bring the threads together until they touch—to fill the space.