

## THREE KINDS OF HAND-WEAVING

BY ELLA MARY SHINN

**A**PIECE of hand-woven cloth speaks for itself to those whose ears are attuned to hear. The confident, bold, free touch of the independent worker tells of the completeness and self-support of the pioneer home and furnishes a very personal and intimate memorandum. To the artist searching for "effects," the old hand-woven shawl, carpet or bed-cover is beautiful and sometimes even stately material. The thread may be rough and irregular, crinkled, unbleached and yielding to age, but the quality which makes the cloth significant and expressive is still there as long as a bit remains.

A line drawn by means of a foot-rule is perfectly straight but wholly uninteresting, while the line traced by the sensitive brush of an old Chinese artist reflects not only the skill of the master but seems to pulsate with his very heart throbs.

It has been pointed out that the only gains by the power-loom were smoothness of texture and speed of production, but the quality of the hand-drawn line, the charm of distinction, which has caused the old fabrics to be gathered into museums, was lost.

There is no more fascinating chapter in our national story than that of the woman at the loom weaving the household linen or bed-covers which reflect the genuine quality of her nature in the perfect, strong cloth, made to last during her own lifetime, and that of her children, if not of her grandchildren. The colors she uses are very few, but perfect in beauty and fadeless virtue. The pattern or "plan of design" communicates to us the pleasure, even gaiety, of the worker who had reached the end of her task, the consummation of all her efforts.

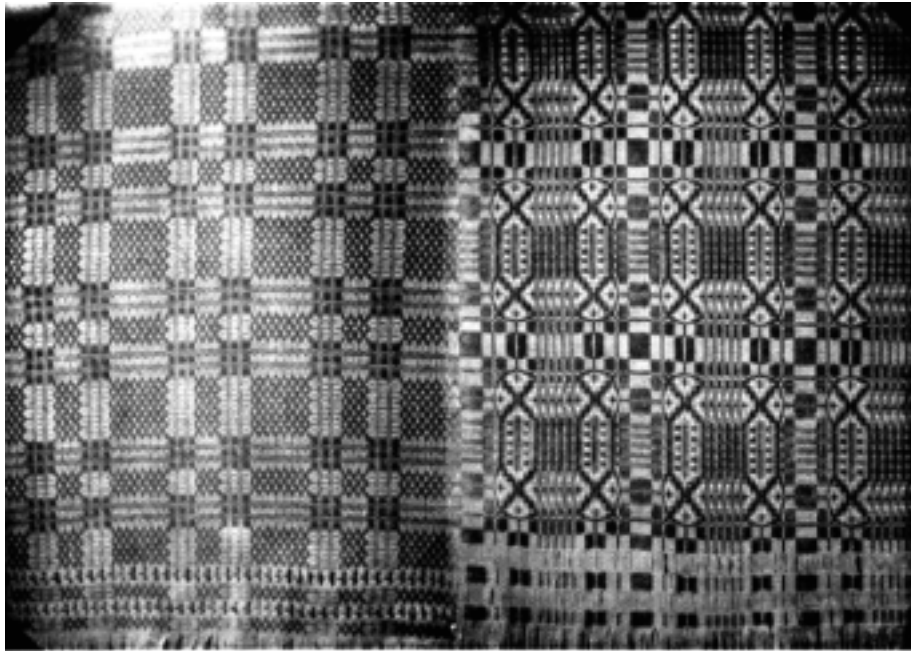
At last the finished product of our foremother's effort was endowed with a name so quaintly imaginary, so seemingly the upshot of sudden thought or the indulgence of a passing fancy, that to try to explain the

“why” would be as impossible as to explain the bird’s song or the colors of the sky at sunset. The Governor’s Garden, Lee’s Surrender, or Summer and Winter, all tell what visions danced before the weaver’s eyes and are beyond criticism or analysis. However, as even birds’ songs and sunsets are discussed, if not analyzed, according to the fashion of our day, I allow myself to inspect and dissect the method of constructing a few pieces of special attractiveness.

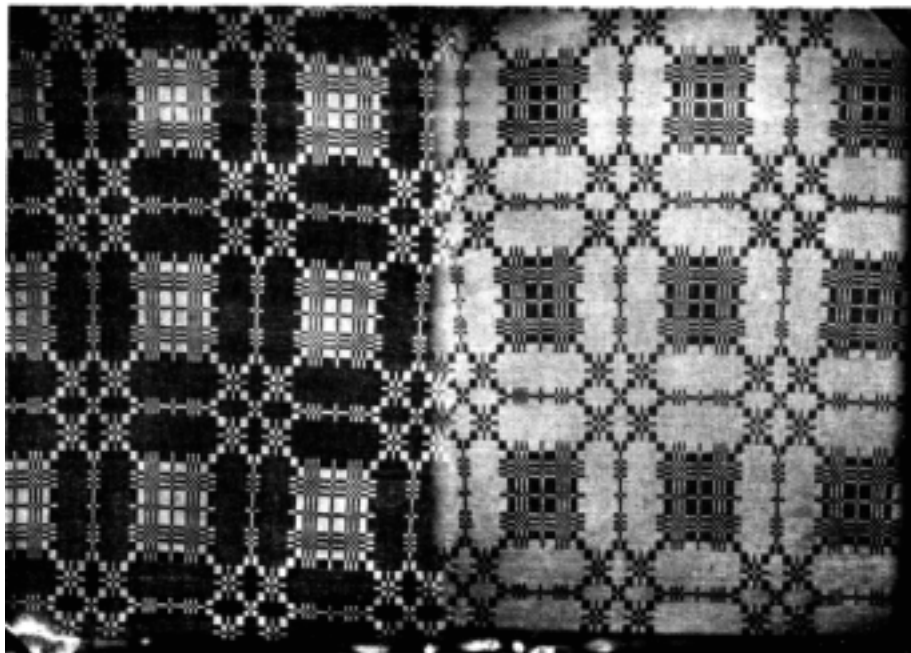
The power-loom was slowly coming into use as national independence was dawning upon this country, but did not entirely supplant the hand-loom of the domestic manufacturer until about the middle of the nineteenth century. Thus the best-known examples of home-weaving are the old blue-and-white coverlets found in so many homes today—“Oh, yes, I have one that my grandmother made”—and the particular one referred to is usually regarded as a fine example of the artistic craftsmanship of the owner’s maternal ancestry. The number and variety of designs seem almost endless, nevertheless it is possible to make an offhand and general division into three classes, according to the kind of cloth produced and the process of making it.

1. The first class is that in which the pattern is formed by the threads of the weft being thrown across several of the warp threads and left lying loose on the surface of the cloth. Sometimes as many as six, seven and eight of the warp threads are crossed without being interlaced. This gives the name of “overshot” to all fabrics, silk, wool, linen or cotton, in which the weft thread floats over the warp as it forms the pattern. By far the greatest number of coverlets were woven in this manner. The loom is usually fitted with only four heddles or wings, but in spite of this restriction, the diversity and beauty of the patterns are great. The surface is usually covered with pleasing sparkles of light and dark, composing small designs, while the result is soothing and truly delightful to live with. This overshot method of brocading has always been in general use by the European and Asiatic weavers and is the simplest and most generally employed method of home pattern weaving.

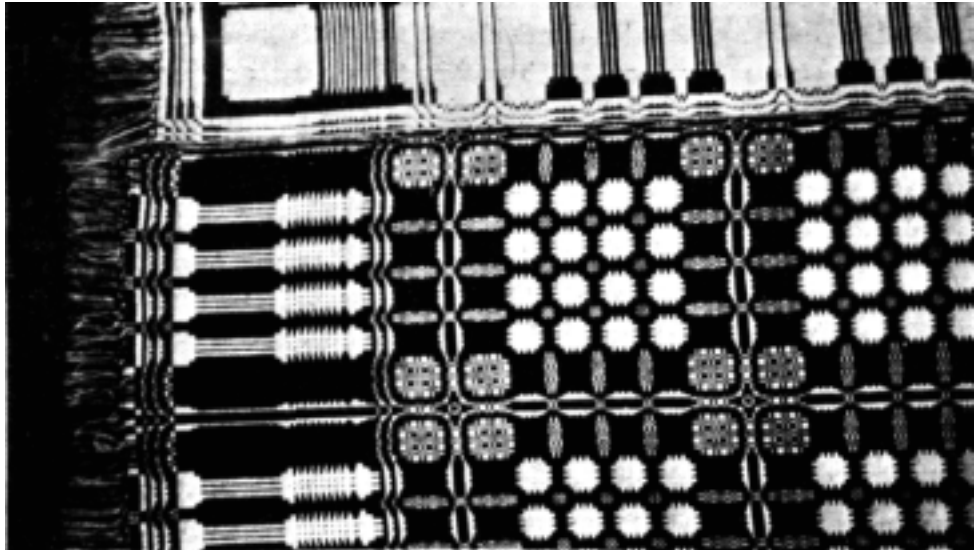
2. The second class is cloth in which the thread forming the design is tied down to the surface of the cloth by a kind of broken twill. Some of the old drafts for this weaving say double cloth, but it is really double-faced cloth. The blue weft of the surface is caught and held by many



OVER-SHOT WEAVING



DOUBLE-FACED CLOTH



DOUBLE-WOVEN CLOTH



DOUBLE-WOVEN CLOTH

little ties of warp thread. It seems to have been the custom to call these coverlets Summer and Winter without strict regard to the pattern probably because one side was very blue and the other very white. Six heddles or wings are required for the threading of these patterns, four of which carry the threads composing the design, while two carry the plain cloth threads. It can readily be seen that as there are no loose threads on the surface, the fabric is more compact than that produced by the over-shot method. The appearance of the cloth is quite different; the design stands out in half-tone masses, or rather the design is three-fourths white while the background is three-fourths blue. The superiority of this class to the first or overshot is in the even compactness of the cloth itself, rather than in the appearance of the design.

3. The third class is the superb double-cloth, composed of two separate fabrics, woven at the same time, one above the other, but interplayed in the pattern. There is much double-cloth to be found in the shops, composed of two fabrics fastened together in the process of weaving, but this particular kind, separate cloths, sometimes one above and sometimes the other according to the demands of the pattern, is not to be found except in the old hand-woven materials. The thread used was always very heavy and the wool was exactly the size of the cotton. The warp was wound thread and thread about, blue wool and white cotton, while the weft was thrown thread and thread about. Two sets of harnesses were used, one for each color, making the threading of the loom somewhat complicated. The result is strong and bold, evincing great skill of the weaver, while the coverlet is heavy in weight. Each part of the design is clear cut in outline, while the contrast of colors is much heightened.

Luther Hooper says it was by the development of this two-harness method that the most splendid results of the weaver's art were achieved. In cloth such as this the design is so inwrought as to seem an indispensable part of the cloth and not a surface application for ornamentation. There is, also, an interesting point to be left with the reader—it is the high perfection attained within the limitations of the simple hand loom.