



WEAVES FROM THE SHUTTLE-CRAFT SHOP

1 "Nez Percé." 2 "Summer and Winter." 3 "Scandinavian." 4 "Whig Rose." 5 "Dog Track."

AN EXPERIMENT

BY MARY W. ATWATER

WE call the Shuttle-Craft Shop at Basin, Montana, a "Village Industry," but it was really intended more as a "Village Diversion." The inhabitants of any small Western mining camp are a haphazard jumble of humanity, isolated from the rest of the world, like a party of marooners on a desert island. Life, especially for the women, tends to be dull and depressing. Few people can exist intellectually on the contemplation of landscape, no matter how sublime; and the joys of hunting and fishing are not joys for every one. The men of course have the saloons, but for the women there is no organized form of entertainment—not even church. Sunday, in the sense of a day of rest, or of dissipation, does not exist in a mining camp. The men work every day in the year except for such

holidays as they choose to take at their own expense, such as Pay-Day, the Fourth of July and perhaps Christmas. The men, however, see other human beings every day "on the job," and most evenings at the saloons. The women tend to stay, each in her own little wooden shell of a "shack," doing the same dull round of small household jobs, and often not exchanging a word for weeks at a time with any human being except the male creature that eats and sleeps under the same corrugated iron roof.

What can the women in such a place do to keep themselves alert and human?

There is a very soul-satisfying joy to be found in the production, by the labor of one's own personal brains and hands, of some object—no matter how humble—which, in William Morris's phrase, "We know to be useful and believe to be beautiful." This pleasure is within the reach of any one, in one form or another. I experimented with weaving—upon myself. The results were gratifying. Hence the Shuttle-Craft Shop.

I hoped, first and foremost, to interest our leisure class—the young girls who have "graduated" (from the eighth grade), whose mothers do all the family housework—for what else have they to do!—and whose fathers, earning "good money," would not for a moment consider allowing their daughters to "work out." These girls either marry—or don't—quite early, driven into it by boredom, and lack of something to do.

I confess that, as far as this element is concerned, my experiment has been of very limited success. We succeeded in interesting the girls sufficiently to bring nearly all of them to the shop in the course of time. I employed a teacher who gave them something to do as they wandered in, or allowed them to stand about and watch what was going on if they could not be induced to take a hand. A goodly number came regularly, and some often enough to learn a good deal about weaving. A few became expert. Most of the girls, however, tired of the work very soon. Of these, some were temperamentally unfitted for this particular type of handicraft, but most, I fear, were entirely unfitted by their very sketchy education and lack of training for connected effort of any kind. Brought up without duties or responsibilities, self-satisfied, and lacking in persistence, such girls are one of the most disquieting products of our educational system.

If the Shuttle-Craft Shop did very little for the girls, it did a good deal more than was expected for a class of women I had hardly hoped to reach



KNITTING BAGS, PILLOW TOP AND GIRDLER, FROM THE SHUTTLE-CRAFT LOOMS

at all—the older women with large broods of children. A number of these have keen delight in precious moments at a loom or a spinning wheel. I have encouraged them to make things for themselves, giving them the use of a loom when we happened to have one idle, providing them warp, etc., at cost and helping such as needed it with advice and instruction.

A third class of women I have also found full of interest in the work—the wives of the professional men. Every mining camp has a number of highly trained men whom I will not call “experts,” because that is a dreadful thing to call a man “out West.” An “expert” is a despised being who always appears in very high yellow boots and a new corduroy suit of Eastern cut, and who stands about and “tries to look wise.” Such persons are merely sporadic in mining-camp life, they just break out now and then, like measles or locusts, and their wives, of course, are of no importance. The men, then, who are not “experts,” but who do wear neckties, often have wives to whom life in a mining camp is quite foreign and difficult. These do not find housekeeping—the free and easy kind that one does in an unplastered house with rough floors, no cellar, no attic, and no built-in features—a completely satisfactory occupation. To one who has never considered a cook stove as anything but a convenient surface on which to concoct “fudge,” the first few months as “kitchen mechanic” are so full of surprises, hair-breadth escapes, triumphs and defeats, that the time goes off well enough. A baby will take such a woman through an absorbed second year. Then what? Of course there may be a fire, or a snow-slide, or perhaps chicken-pox to vary the monotony. She may move from a mountain-side in Colorado to a “cumbre” in Mexico, but these things are only a temporary relief to the monotony. She needs some absorbing, time-consuming amusement. Weaving and spinning do very well.

Our first work at the Shuttle-Craft Shop was all in the four-harness “overshot” style of weaving. Lately, we have been experimenting with several other weaves, especially with the “double-face” or “Summer and Winter” type of weaving. The coverlet illustrated is in this weave. It recently took a prize at the Exhibition of Applied Arts at the Chicago Art Institute. The pattern is taken from an old book of drawings by one “John Landes” who appears to have been a professional weaver of the Revolutionary period. The book is preserved in the Pennsylvania Museum, where it forms part of the Frishmuth Collection of Colonial

Relics. One of the rugs and one of the knitting bags illustrated are also in "Summer and Winter" weave.

The "Summer and Winter" weave has much to recommend it. The effects, though not so rich nor so deep as the "overshot" effects, are more subtle. The web is much more closely woven than is possible in overshot weaving, and has therefore superior wearing qualities. A great variety of textures may be obtained by using the tabby in different ways, and by weaving without a tabby—on "opposites." The patterns are far simpler to draw in than four-harness patterns, and, as it is usual to use a fairly heavy warp, the weaving presents fewer difficulties, in the way of broken threads, etc. This type of weaving is most conveniently done on a loom fitted with "jacks" and two sets of "lamms," but it is quite possible to weave six-harness or eight-harness patterns on an ordinary counter-balanced loom. As the blocks may be of any size desired, and may be made to overlap, the possibilities of design are very greatly broadened.

The rugs illustrated are, from left to right: (1) a rag rug woven with a "Nez Percé" Indian pattern in orange and black, set in; (2) a bath-mat—rags—in "Summer and Winter" weave; (3) a wool rug woven on a Scandinavian three-harness pattern; (4) a rag rug woven on a variation of the "Whig Rose" pattern in six-harness overshot weave; and (5) a cotton cord rug on the "Dog Track" four-harness pattern.

The three knitting bags shown have as a background a pillow-top woven on one of the John Landes patterns drafted for six-harness overshot weaving. The bag to the left is the same pattern on a five-harness draft, the bag in the middle is woven on the Scandinavian "Monk's Belt" pattern, and the one to the right is a "Summer and Winter" bag in a simple "Snowball" pattern. The narrow girdle is a sample of "card-weaving" done without a loom on perforated cards, after the manner of the ancient Egyptians. We have been making these belts for sale for the benefit of our Red Cross branch.

Besides weavings of various kinds, our output includes blue-print drafts of a number of the most famous old patterns. My idea in doing this work has been to put into a definite and workmanlike form as many as possible of the old patterns, in the hope of being helpful to those who are interested in weaving but who have neither the time nor the opportunity to gather and study the old drafts. Some weavers, I know, are inclined to hoard

their precious drafts, and attempt to make of a very beautiful handicraft a more or less unapproachable mystery. I confess I have very little sympathy with this point of view. Weaving is one of the oldest arts in the world. In comparison to the generations and generations of our great-grandmothers who have spun and woven, the few short years during which we have mislaid weaving as a household art are simply as nothing. We have not really forgotten how to weave at all. In any community—no matter how small or how new—women may be found who know how, or who have at least seen weaving and spinning done. We can easily bring it back—not the drudgery of making all the monotonous cloth for all the family clothing, but for the making of beautiful and individual things such as all women and many men are happier for having about them. Every woman should know how to weave. To bring about such a desirable condition, those who happen to be able should be abundantly willing to help any one that wishes to learn.

Any member of the club who has a draft or a photograph of an old coverlet, and who is of a generous disposition, will be doing a kind deed by allowing us the use of it. We may have something to send in exchange.