

COTTON TOWELLING

by MARY M. ATWATER

It has always seemed odd to me that we American weavers, who live in a cotton-producing country, use cotton so much less — and so much less cleverly — than European weavers. We seem to have a prejudice against cotton, and a feeling that for a really handsome piece of work it is not a suitable material.

This attitude toward one of the most satisfactory materials for textiles is, I think, largely the fault of our manufacturers, who insist on supplying us with hard, shiny mercerized cottons instead of the soft, unmercerized cottons we prefer for our work. We are forced to send abroad for the cottons we like to use, and that seems remarkably stupid. Occasionally through the yarn jobbers we are able to obtain "flake" and other "fancy" cottons that are soft and pleasant in texture, but otherwise if we wish a fairly coarse unmercerized cotton there is nothing available but carpet warp, which is harsh in texture and not suitable for all uses, and some knitting and crochet cottons that are supplied only in natural, bleached white, and sometimes in ecru. Perhaps if the handweavers use a little team-work on this problem and demand cottons of the type and quality we have been buying from Sweden some yarn manufacturer may some day take the hint and put out a line of this material.

In the meantime, for fine work, we have Bernat's "Perugian" and "Vittoria Strand" cottons, which are excellent for some purposes. Specifically, these materials may be used for cotton towelling similar to the handsome pieces sometimes seen in the better shops marked "made in Italy," or "made in Sweden."

To be absorbent and agreeable for use as towelling the cotton fabric must be thick and soft. A cotton tabby fabric will not serve, even when made with the unmercerized materials. The weave used in the imported pieces is a simple four-harness weave that gives very handsome effects, and that appears to be unfamiliar to most American weavers. Notes on this weave appeared in the Shuttle-Craft Guild Bulletin some months ago, and the weave was presented at the series of summer "institutes" held in various parts of the country, where it proved of much interest. It therefore seems likely to interest the readers of the *WEAVER*. Whether the weave is Italian or Swedish I am unable to state. I have seen pieces almost identical, even to the little arrow-head figure in the tufting, from both countries. If a piece is decorated with a large pottery bead or a knotted tassel it undoubtedly hails from Italy. If it is free of these somewhat lumpy embellishments it may come from either country. However as the Scandinavian books I have seen all fail to show this weave it is my impression that the original source is Italy and that the Swedish weavers have simply adopted something useful — as I propose we do also in America.

Any small four-harness overshot pattern may be used for this weave, with certain limitations: In the pattern used there should be no very large blocks made up of long skips, and there should be no very small (two-thread) blocks. The

best effects result from the use of a pattern in which all blocks are of four or five threads. Several such threadings are given on the accompanying diagram. The threading for the Italian piece shown in the illustrations is No. 3 on the diagram.

For this weave the warp should be set somewhat further apart than for plain tabby weaving. Bernat's Perugian, set at 24 or 26 ends to the inch will give a good effect. Warp in white or natural. In this weave the warp shows very little.

The tabby sheds are not used in this weave except in the bands with the tufted decoration. The body of the fabric is woven as for plain twill: treadles 1, 2, 3, 4 one shot each, and repeat, on the standard six-treadle tie-up as given on the diagram. On a loom tied to four treadles the sheds, of course, are 1-2, 2-3, 3-4, and 1-4. (Levers 3-4, 1-4, 1-2 and 2-3 on the table loom.) Many of the decorative bands are treadled in the same manner, the pattern effects being produced by changes of color in the weft, as will be given in detail below. The Perugian cotton may be used for weft, with Vittoria strand for the tufted band. However, if obtainable, a somewhat coarser and softer cotton than Perugian would be better for weft. In weaving the beat should be firm enough to make a solid fabric with the warp well covered. The desirable texture is clearly shown on the photographs.

In writing the detailed treadlings below I am indicating the run of four shots: treadles 1, 2, 3, 4, by the symbol (u) — for "unit of the weave." For the rest, the treadlings are written as for the six-treadle tie-up, and those weaving on four treadles or on a table loom should make the suitable transpositions.

Illustration No. 1 shows the border of a piece in natural cotton with decorations in brown and green. Treadled as follows:

Section (a)

(u) twice in natural
(u) once in brown
(u) twice in natural
(u) once in brown
(u) twice in natural

Section (b)

treadles: 4, 1, 4, 1, 2, 1, 2, 3, 2, 3, 2, 1, 2, 1, 4, 1, 4. All shots in green

Section (c)

(u) three times in natural
(u) once in brown
(u) twice in natural
(u) once in brown
(u) three times in natural

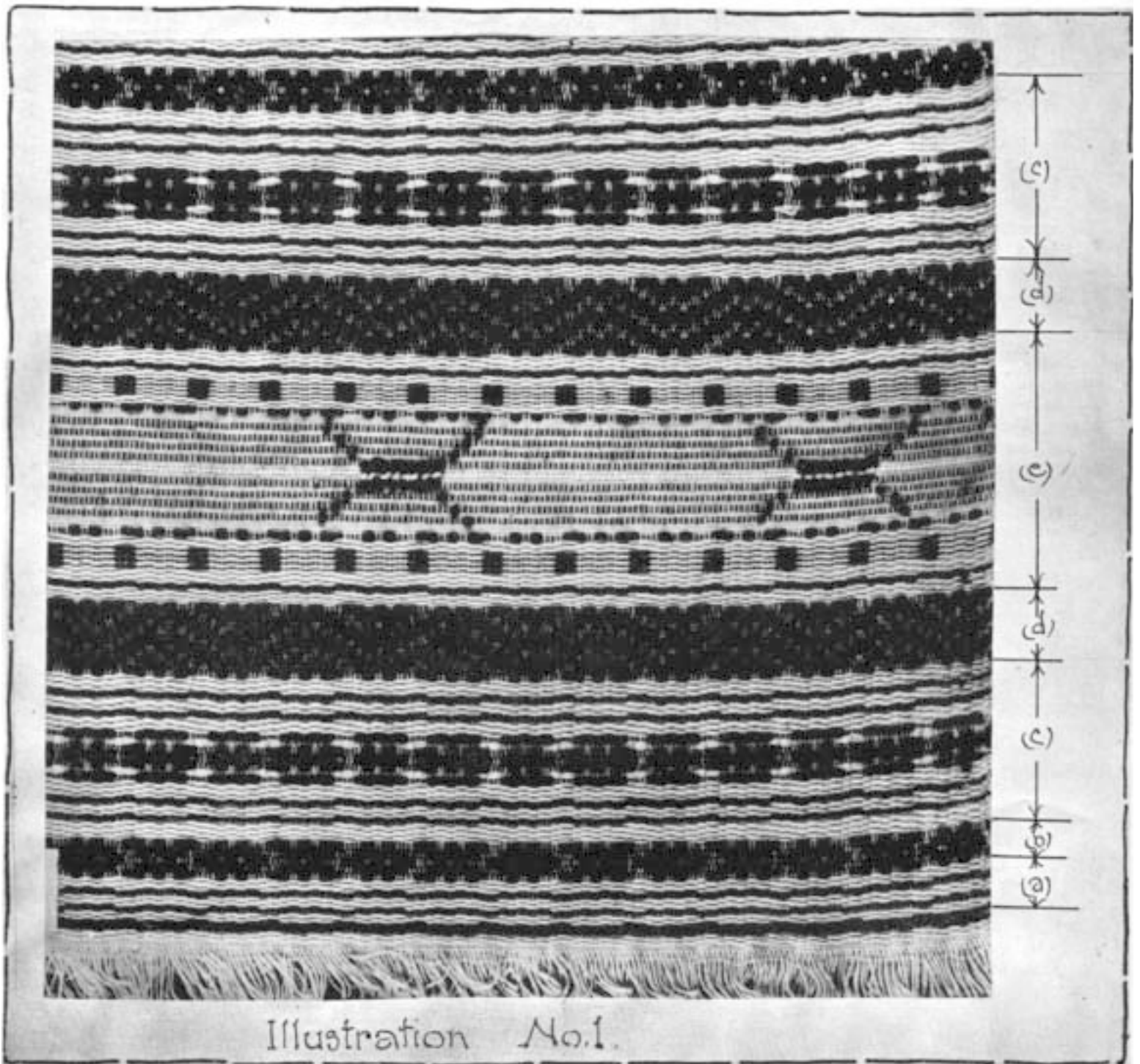
treadles 2, 1, 2, in green

treadles 3, 4, 3, 4, in natural

treadles 1, 4, 1, 4, 1, 2, 1, 2, 1, 4, 1, 4, 1, in green

treadles 3, 4, 3, 4, in natural

treadles 2, 1, 2, in green



- (u) three times in natural
- (u) once in brown
- (u) twice in natural
- (u) once in brown
- (u) three times in natural

Section (d)

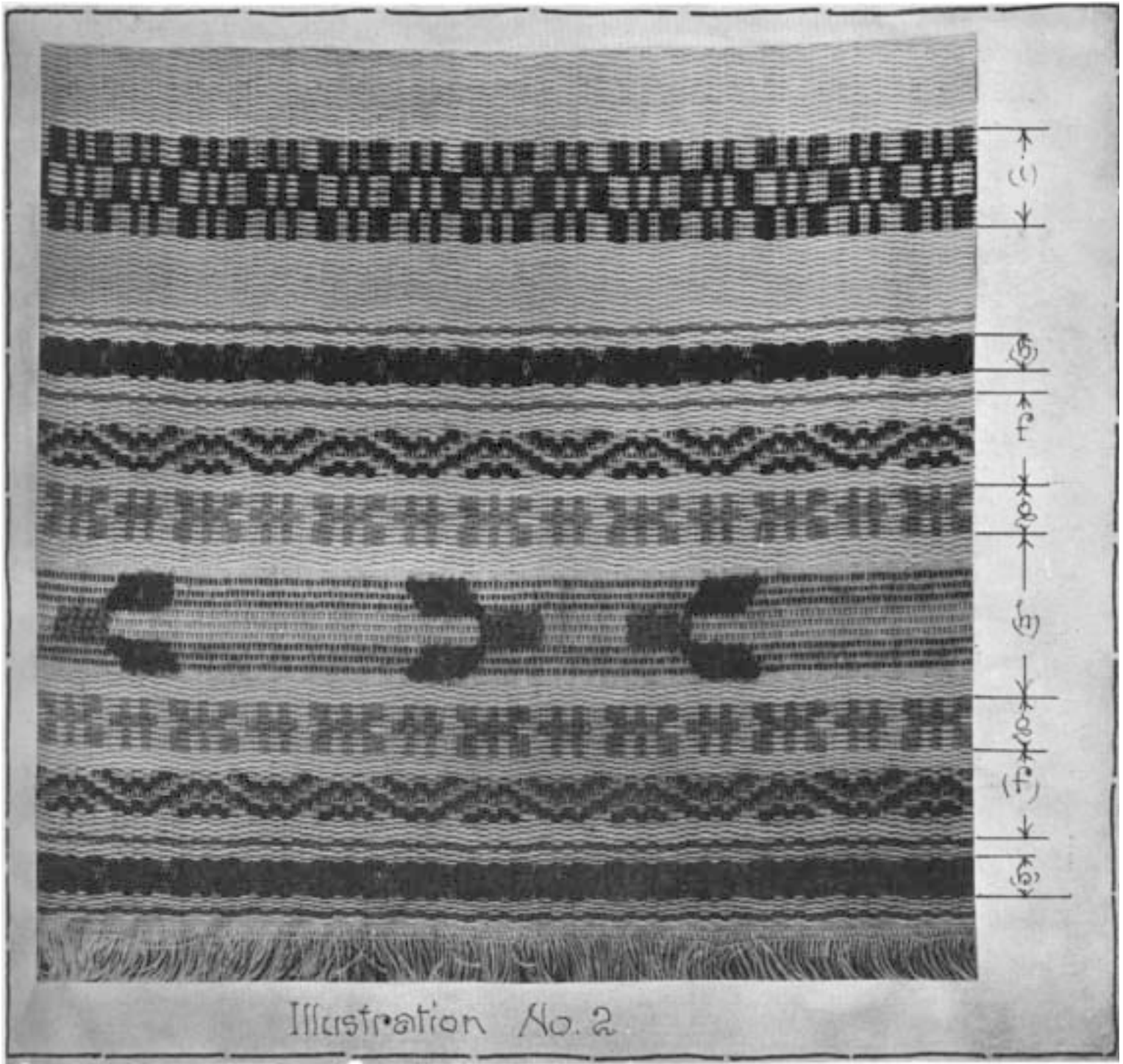
- (*) treadles 1, 4, 1, 4, 1, 4
- treadles 1, 2, 1, 2, 1, 2
- treadles 3, 2, 3, 2, 3, 2
- treadles 3, 4, 3, 4, 3, 4

Repeat from (*)

- treadles 1, 2, 1, 2, 1, 2
- treadles 3, 2, 3, 2, 3, 2

Section (e)

- (u) three times in natural
- (u) once in brown
- (u) three times in natural
- treadles 1, 2, natural, treadles 3, 4, green. Repeat four times.
- (u) twice in natural
- treadles 1, 4, 1, 4, 1, 4, 1, 4, brown
- Four tabby shots in natural



Weave the tufted figure as follows, using Vittoria strand cotton in green.

Tabby, right to left, in natural. Through the same shed pass a strand of Vittoria, and pick up between two warp-ends where a tuft is desired. Take up these small loops of material on a fine knitting needle or small stick. Toothpicks will serve. Take the tufting strand around a selvage thread and bring it back from left to right through the same shed. Weave two tabby shots in natural. Through the same shed as the last tabby shot, pass the tufting strand and pick up again. This is repeated four times in green. The center pick-

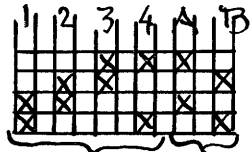
up is in natural. Repeat the four green tufting rows and the series of borders in reverse.

Weave the body of the piece in the (u) treadling, in natural, and repeat the whole series of borders at the other end. Or, if the weave is used for a runner rather than a towel, repeat one or another of the narrow borders at intervals for the entire length.

Illustration No. two was woven in blue and red on the same threading as piece No. one. The bottom border, as will be apparent, is the same treadling as (b) on illustration No. 1. It was woven in dark blue, with the (u) lines in red.

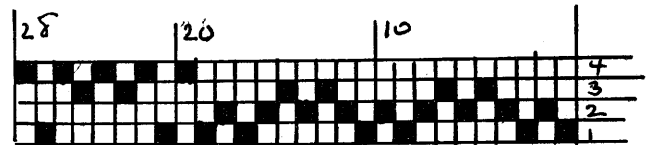
Cotton Towelling — threading Drafts

Standard tie-up —
Sinking Shed

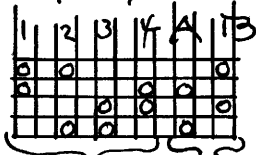


Pattern tabby

Draft No. 1

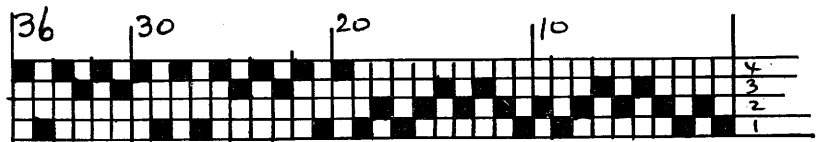


Standard tie-up —
Rising Shed

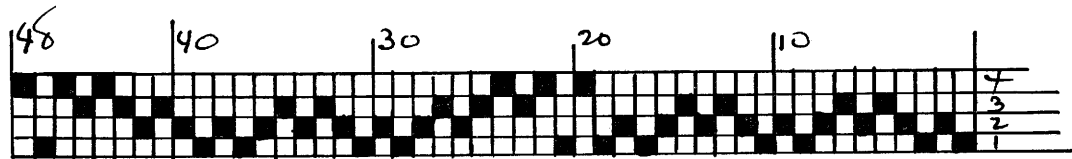


Pattern tabby

Draft No. 2



Draft No. 3



(threading used for the Italian pieces illustrated)

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Section (f) should be treadled as follows:

(u) in natural, four times

treadle 4, natural; 1 blue; 4 natural; 1 blue; 2 blue; 1 natural; 2 blue; 1 natural; 2 blue; 3 blue; 2 natural; 3 blue; 2 natural; 3 blue; 4 blue; 3 natural; 4 blue; 3 natural; 4 blue; 1 blue; 4 natural; 1 blue; 4 natural; 1 blue; 2 blue; 1 natural; 2 blue; 1 natural; 2 blue; 3 blue; 2 natural; 3 blue; 2 natural; 3 blue.

(u) in natural, four times.

Section (g)

Treadle 1, red; 2, 3, natural; 4, red, — repeat four times

Treadle 1, 2, red; 3, 4, natural, — twice

Treadle 1, red; 2, 3, natural; 4, red — repeat four times.

Section (h), the tufted decoration, is set off by (u) in natural, repeated four times. Then three shots of tabby in natural, and the picked up tufting — three rows in dark blue, three rows in red, three rows in dark blue. The red stripe is the center of the border and the treadling should from this point be repeated in reverse back to the beginning.

The body of this piece is woven in bands of (u) in natural, repeated 14 times, between two alternating pattern stripes, only one of which is shown on the illustration. As follows:
Section (i)

treadles 1, blue; 2, 3, natural; 4, blue — repeat four times

(u) in blue, once

treadle 1, natural; 2, 3, blue; 4, natural — repeat four times

(u) in blue, once
treadle 1, blue; 2, 3, natural; 4, blue — repeat four times

Section (j) — not illustrated —

(u) in red, once

(u) in natural, twice

(*) Treadles 4, 1, 4, 1, 4, 1, blue

Treadles 2, 1, 2, 1, 2, 1, blue

Treadles 2, 3, 2, 3, 2, 3, blue

Treadles 4, 3, 4, 3, 4, 3, blue

Repeat from (*)

treadles 4, 1, 4, 1, 4, 1, blue

treadles 2, 1, 2, 1, 2, 1, blue

treadles 3, 2, 3, 2, 3, 2, blue

treadles 1, 2, 1, 2, 1, 2, blue

treadles 1, 4, 1, 4, 1, 4, blue

treadles 3, 4, 3, 4, 3, 4, blue (center)

treadles 1, 4, 1, 4, 1, 4, blue

treadles 1, 2, 1, 2, 1, 2, blue

treadles 3, 2, 3, 2, 3, 2, blue

treadles 1, 2, 1, 2, 1, 2, blue

treadles 1, 4, 1, 4, 1, 4, blue

(*) treadles 3, 4, 3, 4, 3, 4, blue

treadles 3, 2, 3, 2, 3, 2, blue

treadles 1, 2, 1, 2, 1, 2, blue

treadles 1, 4, 1, 4, 1, 4, blue

Repeat from (*)

(u) in natural, twice

(u) in red, once.

Of course many similar but different treadlings may be devised, and several colors — as many as one chooses —

may be combined in this weave. The above treadlings simply show some of the possibilities.

The above treadlings may be used with any one of the three threadings given, and will produce somewhat different figures with each. Draft No. 1 was used for a handsome cotton towel from Sweden, woven in brown, orange and yellow over a natural base. It will be recognized as the little overshot figure we know as "Sweet-Briar Beauty." Draft No. 2 is the familiar "Dog Tracks" pattern. Draft No. 3 — the threading used for the Italian pieces shown in the illustrations — will be recognized as the star-and-rose figure from the pattern known in overshot weaving as "Queen's Delight." The smaller the pattern the smaller the figures, of course, and the larger the pattern the more splashy the effect.

Other overshot patterns that might be woven in the cotton towelling technique include the "Diamond" in its various forms — drafts 1 and 2, page 158 of my Shuttle-Craft Book; draft 7 on the same page; drafts 32 and 34, page 167; draft 71, page 173; The first 50 threads of draft 77, page 177; the first 32 threads of draft 98, page 185; The first 42 threads of draft 141, and the last 76 threads of draft 142, page 200.

The weave is definitely a weave for soft cottons. It is unsuited to linens, or to mercerized cotton, or to rayon, or any other stiff or wiry material. However this method of weaving can be used with attractive results in silks, — for bags and the like, — and might be developed in wool yarns if a heavy, soft fabric is desired. It is best in cottons of the proper texture and affords a method of making a handsome article in this somewhat neglected material.

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