

# GREEK LACE

By BERTA FREY

Most weavers who make any attempt to do original work know the thrill that comes with doing something that is absolutely new and different, — some discovery that has never been made before. But sooner or later there is always a sequel: the discovery of another weaver, who, in a far-away spot, and equally alone and unaided, has made the selfsame discovery. In a Moscow museum, there is a scrap of fabric that is almost an exact duplicate of a fragment found in a pre-Columbian Inca tomb. And more amazing still, the technique is a very complicated one of twisted warp threads. It is the same technique that is done so beautifully today by the Tarascan Indians and described by Miss Allen in *The Weaver* several months ago.

This thing of twisting warp threads — the weaving of “leno” cloth in one form or another — is so widely scattered in Geography and so amazingly distributed through 3000 years of time that one is often tempted to let fancy roam and think what a glorious party it would make if all those

ancient “inventors” could, by some magic, be brought together today to see an exhibition of the present day versions of their inventions. If we moderns could visit such an exhibition, we would probably be equally impressed by the great variety of twisted-warp weaves. And we Americans would be tremendously interested in the Greek version, for it is not too well known to us.

A lovely collection of Greek Leno is that one belonging to Florence E. House, which she has been collecting for a number of years. Florence House has had an unusual opportunity of making the collection: her parents founded The American Farm School in Salonika, a sister was a teacher in the school for several years and her brother, Charles House is its present Director. Some of the pieces in the House collection are old, having been bought in the markets, and some are too new to have made even one trip to the laundry, — gifts of appreciative Greek women to various members of the House family.

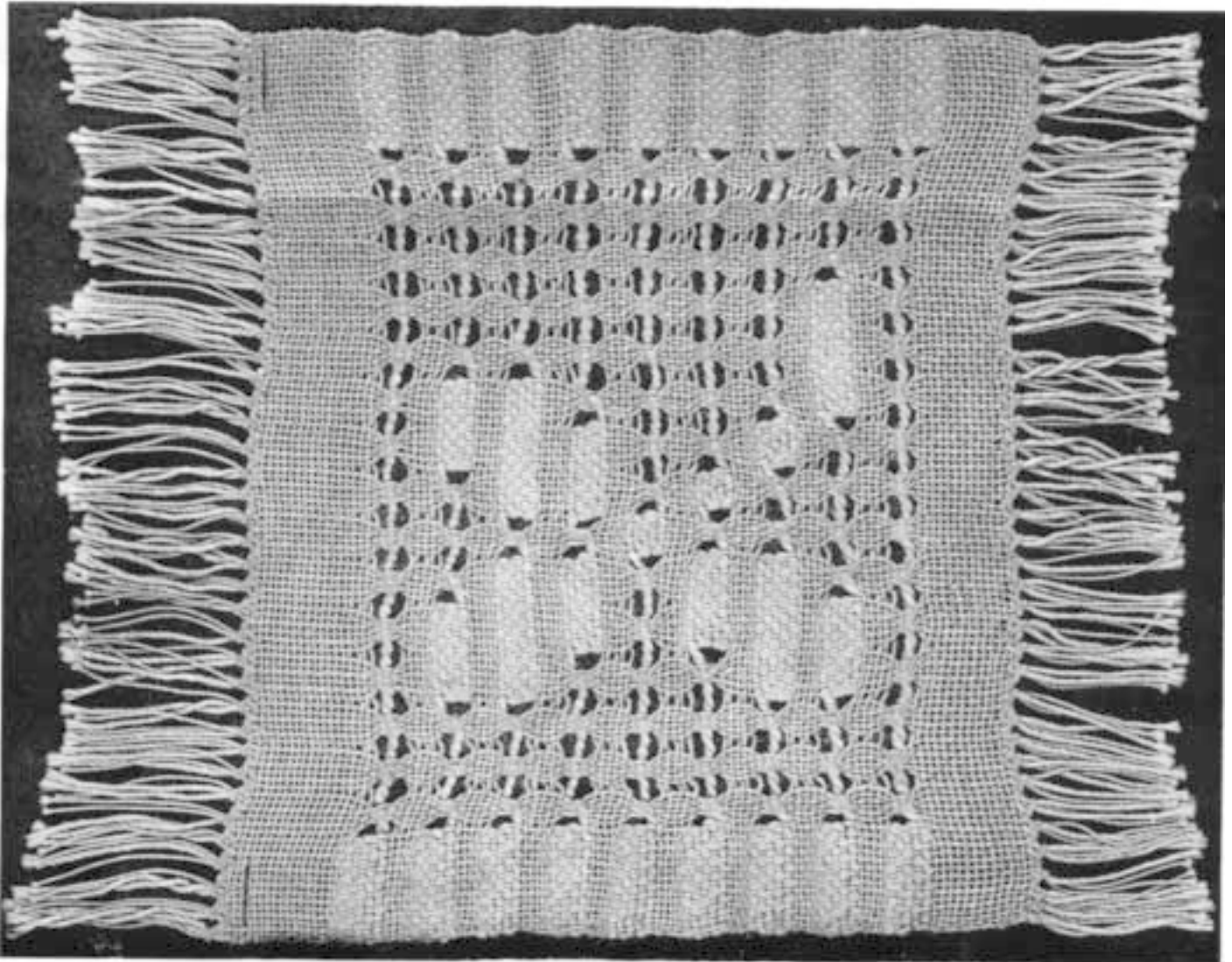


Illustration No. 1

Illustration IV

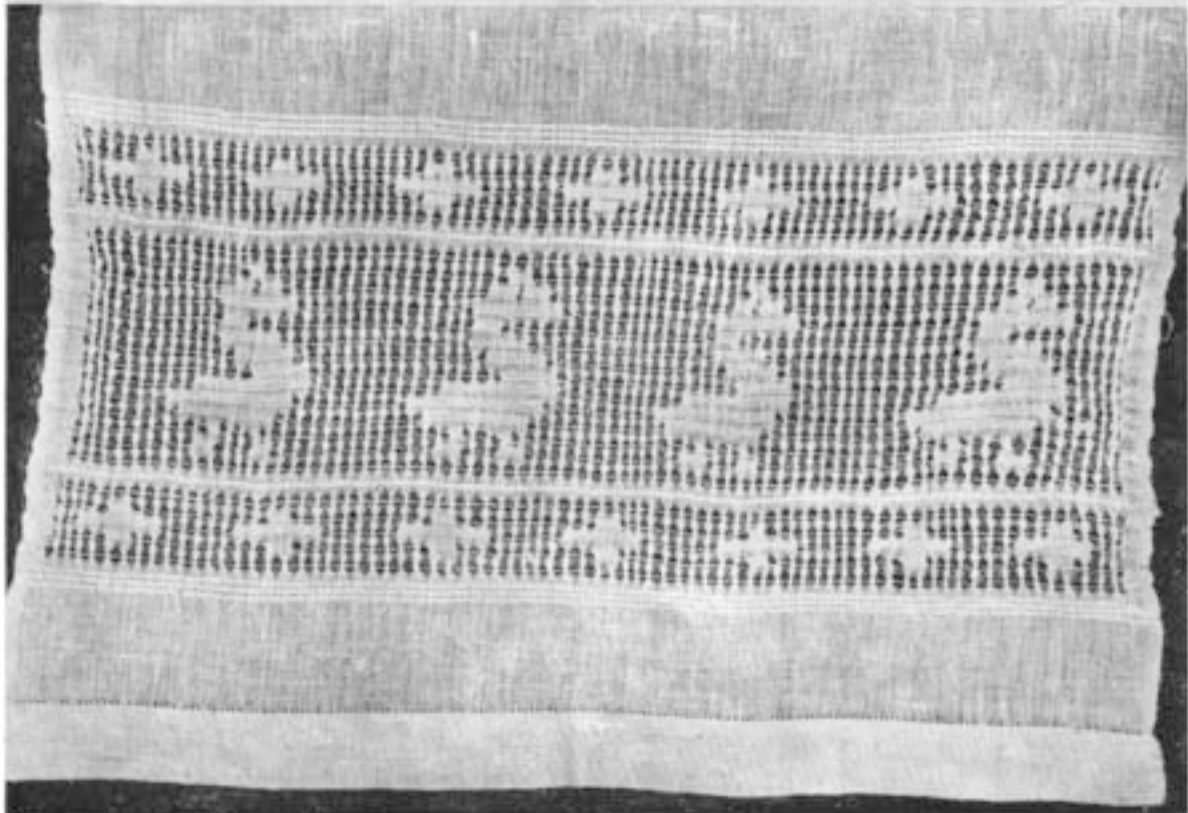
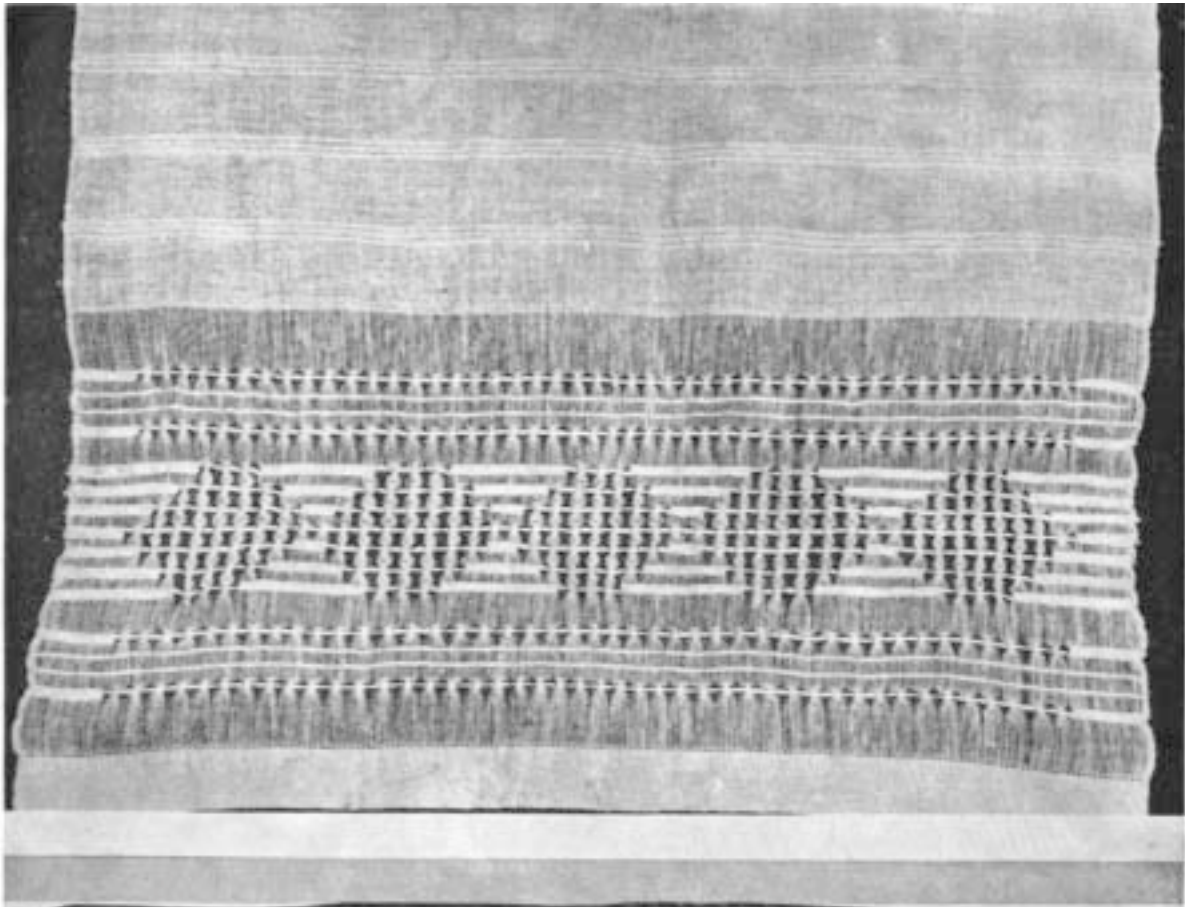


Illustration II



Illustration III

Because of their beauty and interest, Miss House and I have studied the pieces carefully, we have done some translating and interpreting, and we have enjoyed tremendously our own efforts to equal the artistry of our Greek fellow weavers. We have taught it to our students and because we

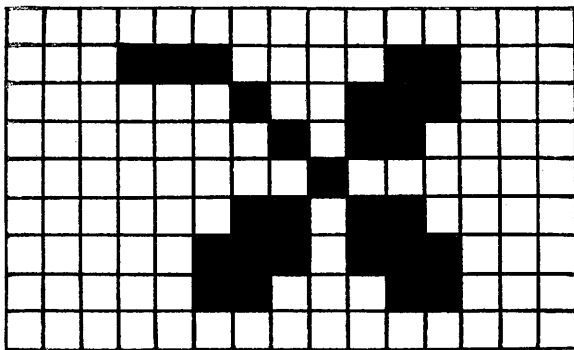


Figure 1

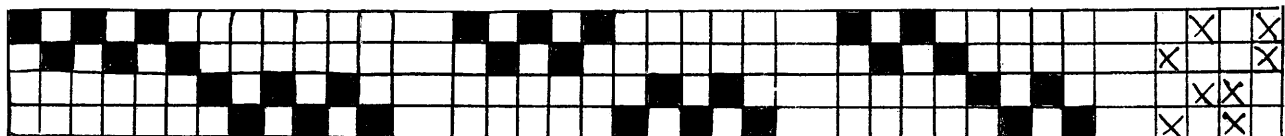


Figure 2

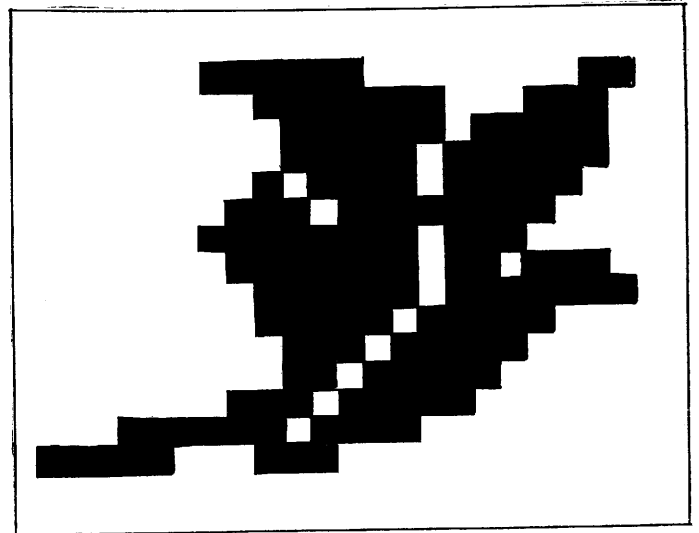


Figure 3

have yet to find someone who does not like it, we are passing "Greek Lace" on to all who enjoy a new technique.

The Greek weavers seem to be real artists — they evidently have an idea which they wish to express, and are such masters of their technique that they create their designs as they go, for mechanical accuracy is conspicuous by its absence. In a single piece they will twist their warps three-and-three, six-and-six, and perhaps even five-and-eight. Nor is it always the same three-and-three that are twisted (see Illustration II). If an area seems to be too heavy, they will break the surface without making a twist, and so keep a more lace-like effect (see detail of Illustration V). Sometimes there are three tabby threads between the pattern threads and sometimes there are as many as eleven. But with all the freedom of execution, there is never anything haphazard in the final effect. There are two points in which they are consistent:—(a) The twists are always made on a neutral shed and (b) there may be three, five, or seven PATTERN shots made, but whichever number is chosen, that number remains constant throughout any one piece of weaving. The Greek pieces are all finer than the usual American hand-weaving, — even the coarsest pieces have 40 warps per inch.

The following directions are for a simplified version Greek Lace, but one which we have found easy to do and quite satisfactory in the finished article. It may be done on a two-harness loom or on any threading having a tabby shed.

Illustration I shows a small sample woven from the design given at fig. 1. It is done in very coarse thread in order to show the construction more clearly. As in all leno weaves, it is advisable to weave a solid edge. When twists are made on edge threads, the selvages are likely to look quite dog-eared. Any design that can be drawn on cross-section paper can be woven in Greek Lace, though it is the natural inclination of this weave to grow unproportionately longer in the warp direction. Compare fig. 1 with Ill. I and fig. 3 with Ill. III. One square of design represents one twist or six warp threads. There are two kinds of weft thread, the regular tabby, which is about the same size as the warp, and the pattern thread, which is at least twice as heavy. The pattern thread may or may not be of a contrasting color. The pattern threads of the leafed design shown in Illustration III are yellow.

To start the pattern: fasten in the heavy pattern thread and weave five shots back and forth over the desired number of warp threads (in the accompanying sample, there are 16 warp threads, eight up and eight down). In this as in all other types of Leno, the **FIRST WARP THREAD MUST BE A TOP-SHED THREAD**. With a pick-up stick, pick up three threads from the lowest shed, and pass the pick-up stick over three threads of the top shed. This makes one twist. Continue the twists across the web and weave five shots for the selvage at the left side. Cut off the heavy thread and finish off by splicing the end in.

With the fine weft, weave an **ODD** number of shots: three, five or seven, or perhaps even eleven, depending upon the size of the yarn being used, and the number of warps per inch. It will be noted that the left-to-right tabby is woven through the shed that normally belongs to the right-to-left tabby. This happens every alternate time that the fine tabby is used. By using an odd number of tabbies, the pattern threads always start on the same side, and the twists are all in the same direction.

For the second pattern row: fasten in the heavy weft thread and weave the selvage. Weave the needed number of twists for the background, (three on sample shown); weave five shots back and forth over three twists for the solid part of the stem, make four twists, weave five shots over two twists and make three twists to complete the background; weave five shots for the selvage, and fasten off the pattern thread.

If the loom is threaded in one of the ways shown at fig. 2, or a variation of one of them, a shed can be treadled to make the twisting process easier, but will give the effect of having been twisted on a neutral shed.

In the bird design (Ill. III), it will be seen that there are fewer fine tabby shots between the pattern wefts in the region of the birds' necks. Evidently the weaver found that her proportions were getting out of balance, and to keep the birds looking as they should, she merely put in fewer fine tabby threads. This is not so clear in the photograph, for it is greatly reduced, but is very noticeable in the original piece. Most of the pieces are about 24 inches wide.

Illustration II is interesting chiefly because it shows so clearly in the little duck figures, how it is not always the same warp threads that are twisted, and also the various sizes of the twists.

The towel shown in Illustration IV is woven of a very fine silk thread with heavy double cotton pattern thread. The silk has not been washed to de-gum it, and the twists are unusually large.

Illustration V shows one end of a towel. The design, when laborously worked out on cross-section paper, proved to be a bunch of grapes. This is rather significant for vineyards play a tremendously important part in the lives of the Greeks today, even as they have for centuries past. Note the "highlights" on the grapes. This is accomplished by weaving, —not all the way across the space of the pattern, but by weaving the five shots part way and then, without another twist, but leaving an opening similar to the openings in Spanish Lace, weaving the five shots over the remaining space. This shows more clearly on the enlarged detail of Illustration V.

The piece-de-resistance of the collection is a "table-cloth", a part of which is shown in Illustration VI. There are three widths in the piece, but the selvages show small scraps of sewing thread. Evidently there were at least five widths in the piece originally. It must have been woven for a bed-spread, for Greek tables are not so large, but their beds are enormous. It is a beautiful piece of weaving, very fine threads sleyed at 80 per inch, and the warps twisted usually eight-and-eight. Even the slight discrepancies in counting squares add to the interest of the design, rather than detract from it. The heavy thread that forms the pattern in the lace border, is used again in a simple "laid-in" pattern for the entire length of the cloth,—about two and a half yards. Nothing is known of the history of this lovely piece; it was bought many years ago in a "refugee market" and it shows signs of age and use. It is safe to guess that the master weaver who did it was as proud of her work when it came off the loom as we are thrilled by it today.

Illustration V

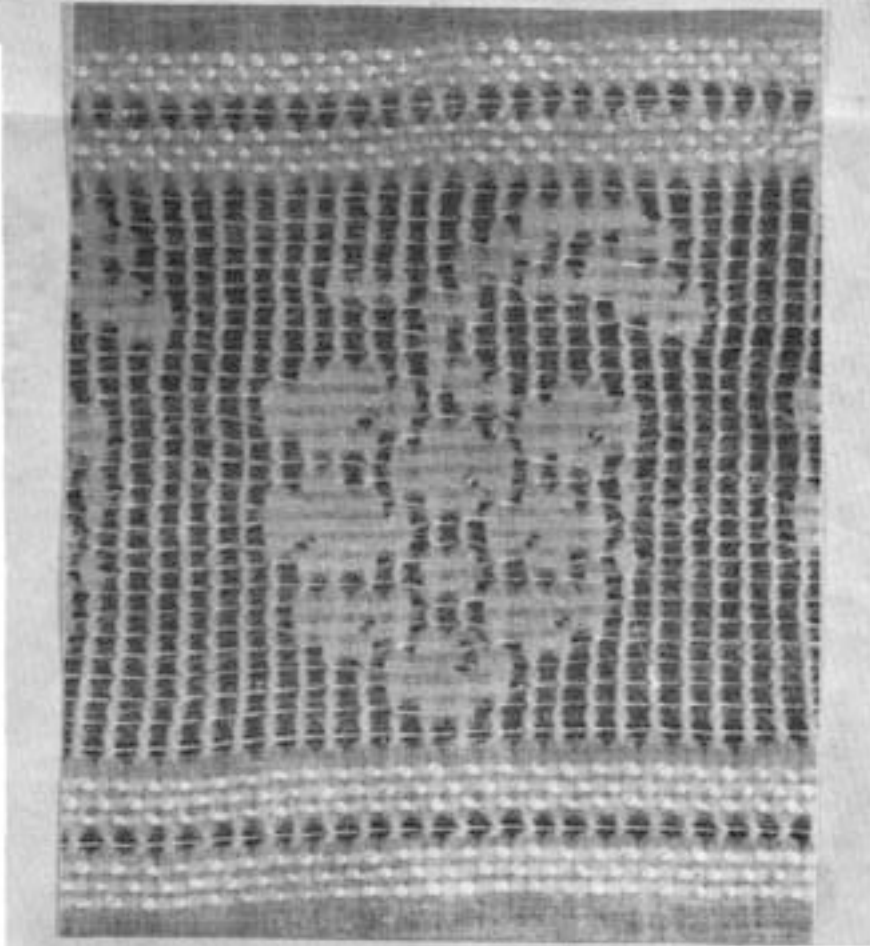
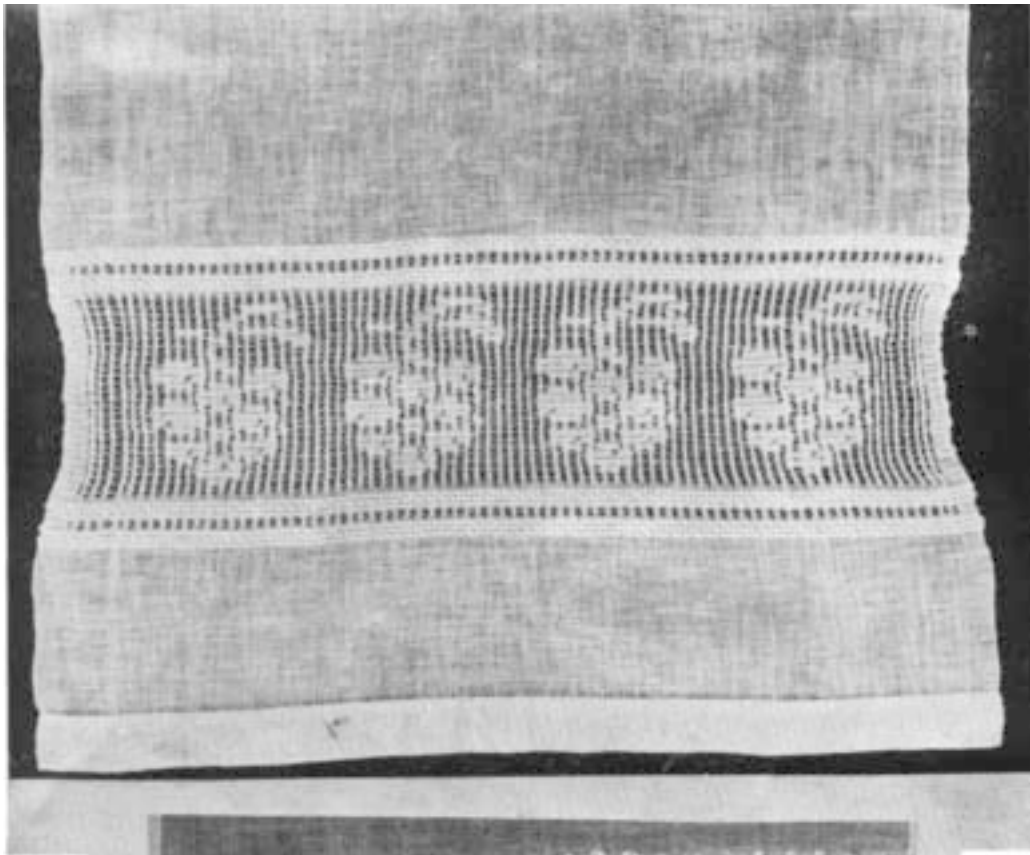


Illustration No. V--Detail

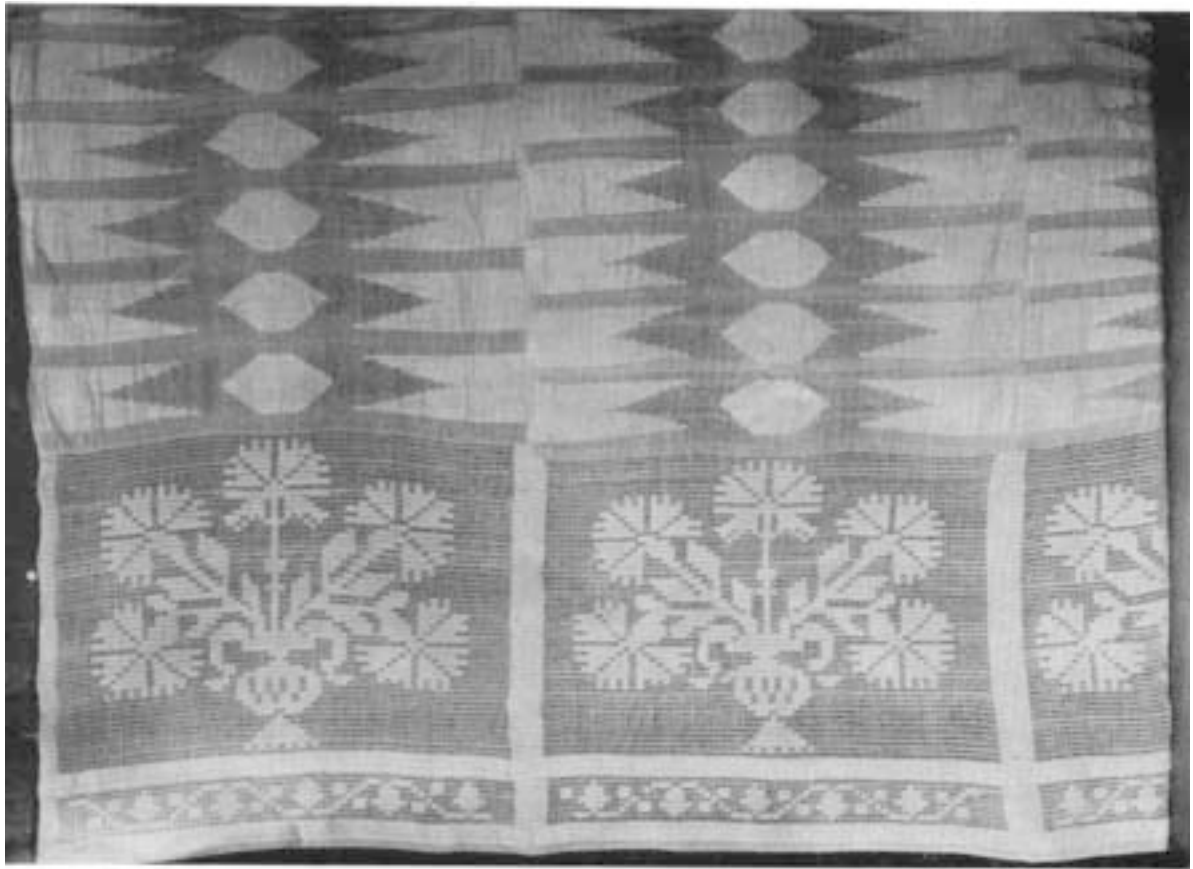


Illustration VI

---

## QUESTIONS and ANSWERS

By MARY M. ATWATER

*Question:* What can I do about badly rusted and bent heddles and reeds?

*Answer:* The best thing to do about rusted and bent heddles and reeds is, of course, not to have them. The better grade of heddles are rust-proofed, and reeds rarely rust on a loom that is in use. If the loom is to be stored for any length of time — particularly in a damp climate — it is wise to grease the metal parts before putting the loom in storage. But if the harm has been done — if, for instance, you have acquired an old loom that has been badly neglected — the time for preventive measures is past. Badly bent heddles and badly rusted ones are better discarded. If all the heddles are in poor shape it would save time and money in the end to purchase a new set of good rust-proofed heddles. A rusty reed can be cleaned by soaking in kerosene and brushing with a wire brush. Rusty heddles may, of course, be cleaned in the same manner, though this may

hardly be worth doing. A damaged reed, however — one that is bent, with the dents pushed together in some places and sprung apart in others — should be replaced. If it is a long reed, and some part of it is still usable, it is a simple matter to cut the reed and keep the usable part for narrow weaving. The ribs of the reed are half-rounds of wood — not metal — and may be cut with an ordinary knife. The dents are separate slips of metal, spaced by a tarred cord that is wound between the dents and around the ribs. The end-pieces of the reed are merely nailed to the ribs and can be removed and replaced without difficulty. The worst thing to do is to attempt weaving through a damaged reed. The imperfections of the reed will produce imperfections in the woven fabric, resulting in streaks the length of the weaving. If hand-weaving is worth doing it is certainly worth doing as well as possible, and it is foolish to handicap one's self with defective weaving equipment.