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# MASTER WEAVER

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Z - HANDICRAFTS - FULFORD - QUEBEC - CANADA

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No. 27

## STANDARDS.

(CONCLUSION)

At first we intended to discuss in this third and last article the standards for articles offered for sale. But since we have already written on this subject in the first article, and since the reaction to the two articles already published has been much stronger than we had expected, we decided rather to concentrate on the general discussion, and to quote as many opinions as possible.

In general the opinion of our readers is favourable, but of course there is disagreement as to the ways and means. Very striking and reassuring is the fact, that in all our correspondence there was only one voice expressing doubt as to the level of the different tests of weaving skill, and judging it to be too high. But even this single veto came from a person who did not worry on her own account, but rather thought about the general reaction. This however did not come.

Thus it seems that the requirements which we have proposed are reasonable and acceptable to the majority of weavers, except of course for those who think that in crafts there should be no standards whatsoever. We have no quarrel with this point of view: the standards are not and cannot be compulsory, and whoever does not feel like passing the tests, will still be as good a craftsman as ever.

But there is quite a lot of disagreement about the standards for articles offered for sale. The idea of an approval seal is catching, but here the harmony ends. For instance many weavers feel that the flying shuttle should be condemned regardless of the articles produced. We have also another extreme: that there should be no discrimination at all between hand- and fly-shuttle.

But here are the letters:

No.1 (Mass). "First, teachers. Unfortunately I can, from personal knowledge, speak only of this area... The need for an accepted, universal standard of teaching is all too painfully apparent here. Most of the local teachers are - inadequate... Some of them plain don't know much about weaving; the remainder are along in years and teach handweaving only as it was practised at the turn of the century. Technically they are good. Creatively they are sterile.

No.2 (NY). "I am interested in receiving information regarding the classifications for weavers... I want to work out a system of classification which could be used in our state - or perhaps by weavers all over the country."

No.3 (Calif.). "The idea seems a good one... The four categories are acceptable."

No.4 (Calif.) "As to the idea of a country-wide guild standards, I am against it. It is nice to have such ideas published to call one's attention to one's own shortcomings, but I think that any attempt to set levels... will encourage the pedal pushing and recipe following which is already bad enough and discourage the "creative" weaver, who has, I grant you, often enough no command of technique, but once in a while comes up with a work of genius."

No.5 (Mass). "If I were to write my feelings on this standards business I'd have to take a week off. I think the principal thing is that there should be more uniformity of requirements where there are standards. In some way I feel it is childish but there are some people who need an incentive to systematize their study. I really think that submitting articles to various exhibits and sales serves the same purpose, as only the good is acceptable."

No.6 (NY). "What is the essential difference between designing a lovely set of place-mats and producing 12 on the same warp with a thrown shuttle and producing 12 with a fly-shuttle? ... If you admit of any tool it seems to me that you admit of all tools - fly shuttle included. There are many people who... want to support themselves independently through their craft. If they can do it better through the use of fly-shuttle and if the product is still completely their own, why should they be condemned for their ingenuity and for availing themselves of the modern tools?"

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Answering these typical letters, we do not need to dwell on those who agree with us, even if they have different ideas about unimportant technical matters such as the size of samples, the written tests etc. But Nos.: 4, 5, and 6 offer a challenge and we must answer at some length.

Letter No.4. The author of this letter is not writing "pro domo sua". She is one of the most experienced (technically) weavers in this hemisphere. Thus the objections are not personal. It is perfectly true that no amount of technical knowledge could help one to design and weave a guest towel. It may be done in 25-frame damask, or 16-frame leno, and still be as repulsive as a "souvenir". But is the opposite also true? Does it mean that a "genius" must be ignorant? A genius with a thorough knowledge of technique will ride circles around another genius without it! And after all if the "genius" does not want to submit to the tests, there is no reason why he should. The tests are for those who want them, and any discrimination against those who do not is unthinkable.

Letter No.5. Here we must assure the reader that the author is a weaver of the highest standards, and that she knows what she is writing about. Still we must take exception to her thesis that the

exhibitions and sales are a good test of one's skill and knowledge of weaving. The problem of exhibitions is a complex one, and we shall develop it later on. Just one question here: if a weaver produces for an exhibition a piece of linen with 100 ends and picks per inch, and even if his designing is mediocre - should such an achievement be left unnoticed? But this happens all the time under the present conditions. As to the articles which sell well, is this a criterion for a craftsman? Hot-dogs and soft drinks sell best, and still they are not the acme of good taste. I should say that in weaving, whatever sells best should be looked at with suspicion, and carefully investigated.

Letter No.6. The controversy about the hand versus fly-shuttle is an old one. What most people do not realise is that flying shuttle is not as fast as it is supposed to be. Therefore there is no reason to use it except in mass-production. As craftsmen we have nothing against the flying shuttle, but we have everything against mass-produced articles. The whole idea of crafts is against it. Because, as our correspondent justly remarks: "If you admit one tool... you admit all tools". Therefore why not a power loom? It is a tool by all standards, and a very good one too. But then where is the difference between crafts and the industry?

Here we must enlarge. A good weaver can make on a narrow warp 60 to 70 picks a minute - a fly-shuttle 80 to 100. The difference is negligible if we take into consideration that the faster we weave, the more time we waste on winding bobbins, tying broken ends, and correcting mistakes. But whoever works with a flying shuttle on narrow warps, means mass-production, where even small gains count. It is still worse when he works with wide warps and fabrics which are later on cut into small articles. The only legitimate use for fly-shuttle is to weave fabrics which are too wide for a hand-shuttle.

And anyhow there was no question of "condemning" fly-shuttle woven articles. They should be simply labelled for what they are: cheap mass-production.

Finally, as every weaver knows, there is nothing "modern" about the flying shuttle. It is more than 200 years old.

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There is one more class of letters, which not only agree with us on the principle, but offer definite and practical suggestions. We shall quote at some length from the one which we consider to be the most interesting from the lot:

No.7 (Mass.). "Wouldn't it be a bit more realistic to have a central agency staffed by business people (preferably men!) to ride herd on standards in the all-embracing sense you use the term? To know, basically, and pass the information along to member-weavers, WHAT WILL SELL WHERE AND WHAT PRICE. That would include: article, design, color, yarns; above all, workmanship; and price. It would be much more than a sales agency, and operated as it could be, would work for the weavers' profit and for the benefit of the consumer. This agency could find the right market for any given weaver - and here's where I disagree with you a bit on your thesis that a weaver should produce only what has a local origin. Each weaver likes to do one thing somewhat better than others; that's usually what he does best. He should not be forced to conform to regional dictates, but he should have the opportunity of selling his work where it is more readily saleable. A central sales

agency-clearing house would help there.

Some day I hope to see a national (or international) organization that will guide, direct, CERTIFY (for consumer's protection) as to quality - design, workmanship, end-use suitability, and sell. The one problem that faces any serious weaver is the constant fight to maintain standards and produce at a price that will show a profit. To attain that nice balance call for careful analysis of every part of loom production - even the shuttle is thrown! It means constantly to cut time (the most expensive component of anything handmade), yet never, never cut quality. A clearing house - sales agency would help here, also. For the slow, inefficient weaver would be in competition with speedier ones and soon either fall by the wayside or improve."

We have no comments on this letter. We could not agree more. Except perhaps that the woven articles should be distributed regionally to create centers of attraction for the tourist. After all, if anything could be bought anywhere, then why travel at all? But obviously this could be handled easily by this central agency.

Theoretically there is already an organization which could develop this idea: American Craftsmen's Educational Council in New York. They have means. The ways are up to the active members.

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What is the conclusion? So far there is no national organization in the Northern Hemisphere which would accept in practice any standards whatsoever. There are local Guilds which do that. Our aim is to bring to a common level the different standards set by different Guilds, so that a Master Weaver of Mass. can be still considered a Master Weaver in Oregon. This will help to create a National Guild, whether it is a Guild of American Weavers, a Canadian Weavers' Guild, or still better a Weavers' Guild of North America.

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## ANALYSIS OF YARNS.

In the next issue of the Master Weaver we shall start analysis of fabrics, and therefore we may say first a few words about the analysis of yarns. Although a layman thinks that a weaver "should" be able to tell at a glance one yarn from another, the problem is not as simple as that.

Theoretically, if we had to do only with pure, untreated, natural yarns, the analysis would not be too hard. But chemical treatment, such as mercerizing, weighting or even dyeing may change both the appearance and the properties of the yarn. When in addition the yarns are mixed in spinning (quite common process today), only the microscope can help.

In many handbooks of textiles we find beautiful tables and microscopic pictures, which show how different the various yarns are. In practice, when we try to use the method indicated, we find out that in most cases the answer is most doubtful, that the pictures greatly exaggerate the microscopic appearance of yarns, and that only