THE REVIVAL OF THE HAND-LOOM. HOW MUCH BETTER THAN WORKING IN A FACTORY.

All rights reserved.

IN most of the recent exhibitions that have been devoted to handicrafts—notably in that just lately held by the Society of Arts and Crafts, there has been at least one case containing specimens of needlework executed on unbleached or partially bleached linen in all its delicate shades of cream colour. This material, known as Langdale linen, takes its name from the Westmoreland Valley where it is made. It is entirely spun and woven by hand, and is bleached in the open air without the aid of chemicals.

It was ten years last Easter since the first piece of it—looking marvellously like sacking—was taken off the loom; the seed then sown has yielded due increase, and now about one hundred persons are altogether employed in spinning, weaving.
and embroidering, besides a few who attend to correspondence and business arrangements.

From the first moment when my friend, Albert Fleming, intimated that he intended to restore that lost industry to the cottages near his home in the beautiful Langdale Valley, I have been a deeply interested spectator. At first, like most other people, though admiring the attempt, I was incredulous as to its stability or ultimate success; and before the linen reached the stage of being taken off the loom it had gone through an amount of difficulties and vicissitudes that seemed to justify the sceptics.

For some years before the revival of the Langdale hand-spinning, Mr. Fleming had been in possession of a little ebony spinning-wheel, and was in the habit of challenging his lady friends to prove by use the possession of those feminine domestic graces that have adorned the immortal woman from Solomon and Homer onwards. All her prerogatives have been lost among modern machinery. It was not so much the test of womanly virtue as he individually conceived it; the little black wheel was rather used as a sort of Ruskin banner, the advance guard and ensign of all that Mr. Ruskin has said concerning the superiority of hand labour, and the qualifications that he deems essential in the character of a noble woman. He has scattered passages bearing more or less directly on these subjects through the literary work of almost a half a century; but it is in the Fables of Falstaff he has so far formulated his theories as to give his disciples a basis on which they can build up work which may help forward the ends that he has in view. In one of the letters that compose the book, he says, that looking over his notes on the projected Sheffield Museum he finds one to the effect that he would exhibit there "All that is reasonable, illustrating the true nature of a thread and a needle,—then the phase of its spinning, then the mystery of weaving, and finally the accomplished phase of needlework." He adds—"Very thankfully I can now say that this notion of thread and needlework, though written when my fancy had too much possession of me, is now being, in all its branches, realized by two greatly valued friends, he spinning on the old spinning-wheel with most happy and increasingly acknowledged results systematized here among our Westmorland Hills by Mr. Albert Fleming; the useful sewing by Miss Stanley of Whitehalls College. I am not sure that Mr. Fleming ever met with a single friend who could so much as tell him whether his spinning-wheel was complete. I am sure that when a wheel in working order had been obtained from the Isle of Man—where they are to a limited extent still in use—and a bundle of flax had been received from Ireland, there was no member of his circle of friends who had any clear idea as to how a connection could be established between the one and the other.

A few inquiries in the village discovered an old woman of more than ninety years who had not forgotten the employments of her youth, and she taught Mr. Fleming and one or two enterprising ladies to spin. I was myself merely a spectator, being engaged in other work, and for one who was willing to look on, there were at least six eager to set their hands to the spindle and the distaff, and at that time only one wheel available.

It soon became clear that to learn how to spin was one thing, and to accomplish the making of a good thread another. To a spectator the thing is simplicity itself; a wheel with two hands passing round the spindle, one of them turns the bobbin, the other twists the thread. You have only to work the wheel with your foot while you draw out a regular quantity of flax, either from the distaff, or from a mass held in the left hand, and pass it unbroken and free from tangle between the fingers and thumb of your right hand towards the bobbin. Practically it takes most people about a fortnight to learn to make a good, even reliable thread. At first the thread is not easy to work, the wheel reverses, then goes in jerks, your foot cannot keep pace with your hands, your hands give out the flax in lumps and fragile fibres. Then the bands get loose, the spindle does not draw, the thread does not twist, it comes all to pieces, the bands slip off altogether; tighten them well up and the wheel will not go round. It needed a good deal of patience from both teacher and pupils, and the revival was undertaken only just in time to save the industry from total oblivion in the Langdale Valley. Our old lady seemed to recall some of the details with an effort, and there was but one other, some six or seven miles away, who had any recollection of it. When these two met there was a very animated discussion between them as to whether it was best to spin from the distaff or the hand, each being convinced that the other was wrong.

As soon as the spinning was set on foot there was a great searching for wheels all through the country-side. Two or three delightfully picturesque old ones were presented by Lady Beuliva; a few more were heard of in outlying country cottages. These last were the objects of very pleasant drives, but in most cases when they were discovered they turned out to be so broken, imperfect or worm-eaten that this part of the quest was abandoned, and the village carpenter, who had some mechanical skill, was commissioned to imitate the one that had been made in the Isle of Man.

Wheels, flax and some experience having been secured, the first step may fairly be said to have been taken, but the next was more difficult, and I must own that when I who looked on sometimes thought that the attempt to bring into practical form the ideal theories of Mr. Ruskin would go no farther, not perhaps quite realizing that a sum of two hundred pounds had been dedicated to the venture and that to that extent, at the very least, the attempt was made in sober earnest. In the first place we all said that there was no demand for hand-made linen. People appeared to be perfectly content with what they could buy in the ordinary way, and even supposing that a really superior article could be produced in the old method, which result seemed exceedingly remote, it must be at an enormously advanced price, and we thought that the country-people would look upon it as a mere fad, and would
A RESTORED INDUSTRY.

DISPUTING AUTHORITIES.

hardly be inclined to give up time enough to it to get over the initial difficulties.

At this point a lady who had known Mr. Fleming for many years, and who was then living in the Langdale Valley, offered to help in organising the industry, and for about six years she filled the position of practical manager.

From Mr. Fleming’s house, which is situated on the top of a high rock on the fell-side, you can look up the course of the Brathay as it flows through the green meadows, and beyond the Brathay across the little triple lake of Esthwaite to the village of the same name. Here a suitable cottage was found and newly-christened St. Martin’s, after the saint who divided his cloak with a beggar. It is a 17th-century little place with a wood clothing the rising ground behind it and a rocky stream within fifty yards of it. In this home the industry was started on a business footing. The country women were taught to spin, and as soon as they were all competent, wheels were lent to them, flax was given out and the yarn paid for by weight. They soon saw the advantage of a home employment by which they could earn five or six shillings a week, and which could be taken up in leisure moments without interfering with domestic duties.

When a loom and a weaver had been with some difficulty found and established in an outbuilding, it may fairly be said that the scheme had struck root. Even then there was much discouragement to be faced: enthusiasm was the oil that made the wheels go round, for there was a very lucrative as well as a picturesque side to the undertaking. All the workers had everything to learn. At first only two or three could spin a strong useful yarn, several others were with great trouble and patience slowly producing a lumpy unequal thread, rotten in parts and in others resembling a very bad piece of string. The wheels, like all the tools of the inexperienced workmen, took strange freaks, the bands continually slipped off, or a message would come down to St. Martin’s that such and such wheels would not work. These little aberrations often meant evening walks to outlying cottages to give practical help and encouragement, and the purchase of a good deal of thread that never found its way into any web.

The first bobbins that reached the weaver were a marvel of variety. There were threads of such diverse qualities that they could by no means be used on the same piece of cloth, thread that was so unequal and rotten that by the time the weaver had examined, cut and joined and made it ready for use he had spent almost as much time on it as if he had spun it himself, thread bad beyond all possibility of utilisation. After many failures and discouragements it was a proud and triumphant moment when the first web of about sixteen yards was taken off the loom, an event so important that it was especially reserved for Easter Sunday, albeit to the uninitiated it appeared only like a piece of dark-coloured sacking exceedingly uneven at the edges.

In those early days the cult of the spinning-wheel had a picturesque romance and enthusiasm about it that has now settled down into a businesslike utilitarianism. Votaries rose early in the morning, and while the web of the paternal spindles hung dew-laden on the heather the shining flax sped between the rose finger-tips of the temporary Arachne and added its quota to the roll of accomplished handwork. The white of the wheel pervaded the morning dream, and accompanied readings from the poets in the evening. Those who did not spin became quite the exceptions. Even the young Hercules, whose latest feat had been the ascent of five mountains in one long summer day, sat down to the spinning-wheel to try his skill. Other enthusiasts finished breakfast with extraordinary celerity, fetched a wheel, poured water into one of the saucers, moistened their fingers, and had done yards of thread while the lookers-on were discussing their second eggs and the plans for the day. In the evening, when we were on the lake, and noting the glow in the sky and the deepening purple of the mountains, a boat would draw up alongside, and we would hear a gentle undercurrent of talk concerning bobbins, wheels, looms, and needles, qualities of thread, and rates of payment.

At any time of the day groups of people might be seen gazing in rapt admiration at what appeared to be a big piece of calico laid upon the ground, or crowded into the bathroom, washing the precious fabric with their own hands. Once too every available piece of it was carried to a specially picturesque, but in truth remarkably rocky, field, that there, amongst the very choicest surroundings, in full view of the stretch of the Langdale Valley and the misty blue mass of its Pikes, the linen might be bleached by the sun, and the wind, and the purifying dew. Surely, if inanimate things can indeed imbibe anything of the human interest that has gone out to them during their creation, these first hand-sewn and woven sheets should bring wonderful dreams to their possessors, although a Philistine critic said, when he saw them, that he could match the material with his cook’s apron.
The spinning industry once established the work progressed steadily, and it did not seem long before Mr. Fleming was able to send out from St. Martin's specimens of different qualities of linen to his customers. At first he looked over the work himself, visiting the little home daily while in Westminster, wrote articles for magazines, and endless letters, and made himself known in every way. It soon became evident that there was an actual demand for the hand-made linen, notwithstanding its high price, even in its very crudest form. The first piece was immediately purchased, and the orders have always exceeded the production.

Mr. Fleming's original idea was to make sheets which should restore long-lost qualities of solid endurance, and these are still made, but as time went on and the linen became a really beautiful fabric it found a place of its own. A lady who has a great talent for needlework, recognised its special capabilities, both of colour and texture as a foundation and background for silk or felt embroidery, and for the open stitches called Greek face. She has now quite a large number of ladies engaged in working on it. They embroider quite, cut out panels from all sorts of smaller articles. Most of the work is at the headquarters of the industry, St. Martin's, Elverwater, near Ambleside; some of it has not returned from the Chicago Fair yet, where it has received an award. The drawing on p. 689 was made from specimens selected from such portions of it as happened to be in London, at spoon of the most beautiful pieces it is not possible to give even a rough idea. A material which is a mixture of white silk and richly coloured linen was worked in white silk, a richly coloured linen was embroidered with silk of precisely the same tone. Many other pieces of work are executed in brilliant and beautiful colours. The industry is still spreading; there are several off-shoots in England, and three or four in Ireland.

"LIKE A WORM IN THE BUD."

By ANNE BEALE, Author of "The Queen of the May," etc.

CHAPTER XXII.

As I vor sat pondering over what Mr. Glyn had said he was startled by hearing footsteps, and looking up saw Mr. Vaughan.

"Is that how you look after the sheep, Ivor?" he said, severely. "Flute, sacket, psalter, dulcimer, and all kinds of music I know you and the sheep anywhere. You will be ruined, body and soul, if this music-mania lasts."

Mr. Vaughan had been angered by Mr. Glyn's visit, and had come to see what was about.

Ivor rose and glanced at him; he perceived that his face was very stern.

"I am sorry, sir, but I don't think the sheep have strayed," he said.

"I suppose Mr. Glyn has been talking to you of his plan for you?"

"Yes, sir."

"And now listen to me. Flutes and fiddles have nothing to do with flock and flocks. I consider that you sacrifice my time and your own talent. It is an idle and vagabond pursuit, and will lead you to harm. My plan is that you give it up."

"Oh, sir, I cannot!"

"While in my service you must."

Ivor looked down at his beloved fiddle; he had strung and tuned it into a wonderful instrument, and could borrow sounds from it that nobody believed it possessed. He had verified Mr. Trabberhe's prophecy, and could play better than he had ever played. The poor boy took it up, pressed it to his heart, and burst into tears.

Mr. Vaughan was perplexed, and did not know how to proceed, but he believed that he had Ivor's best interest at heart; he so repressed his rising pity, and told him sternly to be quiet, and to put down his fiddle.

"Oh, master! master! I should die if I gave up music," sobbed Ivor, still straining his fiddle to his breast.

"People don't die when they lose silly toys. You may use such strong language. I say you must give up music."

"I couldn't call the sheep without my flute, sir."

"What do you mean?"

"They know my call, sir, and so does Vick. May I call them home, sir?"

"Yes; it is time you should see after them."

"You are not angry, sir? I don't think it is wicked to be fond of music, because the angels sing and play in heaven."

The puzzled Mr. Vaughan bid him call the sheep.

Ivor blew a few plaintive notes on his flute, and the sheep appeared one by one in the distance.

"That is how I call them home, sir," he repeated the call louder than before, and the sheep went up parts of the hill-side, following one another, as they usually do, in the sheep-walks they had made. "That old sheep always leads, sir, and that black sheep always waits for the lame one. I think they are sorry for one another."

Holy thoughts of the Good Shepherd softened Mr. Vaughan's feelings towards Ivor, whose tearful eyes sought his, as he continued, "They know me quite well, I follow me; they are so fond of music."

"The dog is useless, then," said Mr. Vaughan.

Ivor changed the notes of his flute to a brisker, sharper sound. Off went Vick, and by dint of barking and jumping brought the sheep in a body before Ivor.

"There, sir," said Ivor, in innocent triumph, "Vick is the best dog in the world!"

He began to count the sheep, and, finding that they were not all there, blew his flute louder and louder, until the truant appeared on the brow of the hill; then he turned to Vick, and they too barked homewards.

"Strange!" murmured Mr. Vaughan.

The surrounding hills were echoing back the flute-call while Ivor was still reckoning his sheep. The sun was setting, and the shades of evening fell, turning the distant sea into gold and the mountains into purple and red.

Mr. Vaughan, Ivor, and the sheep cast long shadows till the quenelle of Nature was unbroken, save by Ivor's flute.

Even Mr. Vaughan felt the grandeur and peace of this sunset amongst the hills, and thought of the glory of God. He saw the tears still glittering in Ivor's eyes, and vainly tried to resume the subject of the music. He mentally put it off to a more suitable moment, but his words were already rooted in Ivor's mind. When Ivor had counted his sheep, he said, "I always take them to the warmest place, sir. May we go on?"

Mr. Vaughan assented, and Ivor blew his flute and began to descend the hill; the sheep followed, kept in order by Vick. Mr. Vaughan followed also. They reached a sheltered place, covered with soft turf, scattered furze-bushes, heath, and harebells.

"They like this, and sleep here, I think," said Ivor, confidentially. "Now, sir, may I give out the cows?"

He seemed to be in a hurry to get away lest the dreaded prohibition concerning the music should be renewed. As soon as Mr. Vaughan gave permission, he and Vick ran down the hill as fast as they could, leaving Mr. Vaughan behind.

Although a cold man, Mr. Vaughan was not without feeling: who is? But when Ivor felt, he claimed himself so closely by his "rule of conscience," that he frightened feeling away. He was fond of Ivor, delighted in his music, and felt inclined to indulge him, but the question was, is it right? He was so persistently that he began to think every pleasure sinful. He stood some time where Ivor left him, reflecting on many things; he supposed that all the disappointments and daily annoyances of his life were for his good, and he endured them unflinchingly. But why was everything against him? Even that day Mr. Glyn had come to disturb the pleasure Ivor had in the hills; he had awakened him to a sense of the sinfulness of an art that he loved. And he must make the boy unhappy, and sacrifice a recreation himself because he feared that to indulge was to err.

While Mr. Vaughan was seeking for what he would not find, the key to his difficulties, Ivor was driving the cows afield. They had been milked, and were waiting for him; they, too, knew the flute and Vick, and followed quietly to their resting-places.

As he returned from this, his last labour for the day, he saw Mara. He frequently did see her at this hour and spot; she was standing by a well that sprung beneath an old oak, and seemed