An Ancient Swedish Handicraft

IN last month's issue of The Craftsman there was illustrated a feminine art-industry of the sadly circumstanced Russian peasantry. The illustration was an example of the so-called "Muscovite embroidery." A woman of the suffering class had wrought into a homespun fabric, with the irony of bright-colored stitches, the story of want and of the grief arising from it. The desire for a larger, more abundant life—for food, rest, happiness—was compressed into an inscription of the deepest pathos: "Let us sing and dance and forget for a while how bitterly we live."

We have now to deal with a fireside industry of another Northern race: this time, a sturdy and contented people, enjoying equally labor and recreation; if we may judge by the indications set in the work with the same clearness as in the Russian handicraft. The industry at present illustrated represents the oldest human labor, with the exception of husbandry, in relation to which it occupies the position of the feminine to the masculine element. The spade and the distaff have ever been the closest companions. Spinning and weaving are attributed even to the gods and heroes, and all the glamor of romance surrounds one of the most necessary and usual employments.

In the revival of hand labor which is in actual progress, interest has naturally turned to primitive ways of producing textiles, with the result that in numerous regions of France, England, Ireland and the United States, long disused wheels and looms have renewed their activity: thereby restoring old-time thrift, and promising future prosperity to these same communities. In Sweden, with whose peasant industries we are now concerned, the revival of the feminine handicrafts,—especially the production of textile fabrics—has been due to the efforts of a society known as the *Handarbetets Vänner.* By this means, the art-weaving of the Swedish peasants, which is an inheritance from pagan times, has been saved from the danger of extinction, which it incurred through the introduction of machinery. The Swedish peasants, according to history, the testimony of travelers, tradition, and the proof of the old tapestries themselves, have always taken great pride in decorating the walls and furniture of their houses with the

products of their hand-looms; each district of the country long possessing a typical and distinctive style, owing to the difficulties attendant upon inter-communication; while the individual workers of each district vied with one another in the making of designs and the choice of color. By the revival and centralization of the work excellent results have been obtained. At the present time so general an interest is felt that it inspires persons of all ages. The craft is taught in the kindergartens where the mechanical part of the subject is easily imparted to the children who work at looms suited to their size. Young girls do not consider their domestic education complete, unless they have taken a course in weaving, and possess looms at which to practise and perfect what they have learned theoretically. The fascination of the work is great: those who have ever produced the material of a napkin, sheet, or dress, always finding the same pleasure in their work, and the white-haired woman working at designs and color-effects as enthusiastically as her young grandchild.

The artistic and the practical qualities of the Swedish handweaving are such that the craft should be carried and imitated widely abroad. It has already been successfully introduced into the United States, through the enterprise of a young Swedish woman, Miss Elizabeth Glantzberg, who, a number of years since, came as a visitor to Springfield, Massachusetts, bringing with her several specimens of the textiles, together with a handloom. Both the finished work and the primitive means of producing it awakened so much interest in the New England town that Miss Glantzberg, upon her return to Sweden, carried with her the idea of establishing herself in America as a teacher and producer of handweaving.

The idea passing to a decision, she returned to the United States and with her sister, in the summer of 1902, opened a school in Deerfield, Massachusetts, which at once drew pupils from widely different sections of the country. Further, the interesting products of the teachers of the school have become known through numerous exhibitions of Arts and Crafts Societies which have been recently held in the larger cities.

The Misses Glantzberg have now a studio in Boston which

serves the double purpose of a school and a Swedish domestic museum, since the visitor finds there a representative interior in which all details have been preserved, even the bright, picturesque costumes of the women who weave in illustration of the method.

The walls, floor and furniture of the studio are decorated with the textiles there produced, or by similar rugs and tapestries brought from Sweden, all of which show the primitive, but highly decorative designs which have prevailed in the craft for centuries. Against this interesting background, the simple structural forms of the furniture are projected in bold relief, while the otherwise too severe effect of the whole is modified by the small objects placed at certain carefully selected points: wooden mugs, boxes and trays painted with figures and designs in the primary colors; brass candlesticks simple in shape and workmanship to that pleasing point just escaping crudeness; dolls in a row of stiff, quaint little figures which counterfeit precisely the pose and carriage of living peasants, occupying the length of an old mantel.

The focal point of this interior is, of course, the loom with its attendant weaver. The former is heavy in construction, with solid treadles and overhead pieces, lateral four-pronged appliances which have been compared to a ship's wheel, hanging pulleys and large, primitive-looking shuttles.

The weaver at this loom is attractive as a Swedish type, as pronounced in person and dress as stage or picture can offer. Her costume, not unlike that of a Roman peasant in color, has a character all its own. It consists of a dark blue woolen skirt with its front striped horizontally in black, red, green, orange, and white. The blouse is white, full, and bound with a green kirtle which laces in front with elaborately-wrought silver eyelets. Over the blouse the weaver wears a singular garment, simulating a waistcoast behind, and strapped to the body by bands crossing in front and fastened to the kirtle by other silver ornaments. This waistcoat is green, and contrasts with the red kerchief which lies below a rosy face and mass of blonde hair. These, finally, are thrown into relief against a high pointed cap of black, accented with a line red and finished with cord and tassels.

Altogether this Swedish interior and its inmates offer one of

the most attractive studies in nationality to be found in the Puritan City, which has of late years become cosmopolitan.

EXPLANATION OF THE ILLUSTRATIONS FURNISHED BY THE MISSES GLANTZBERG

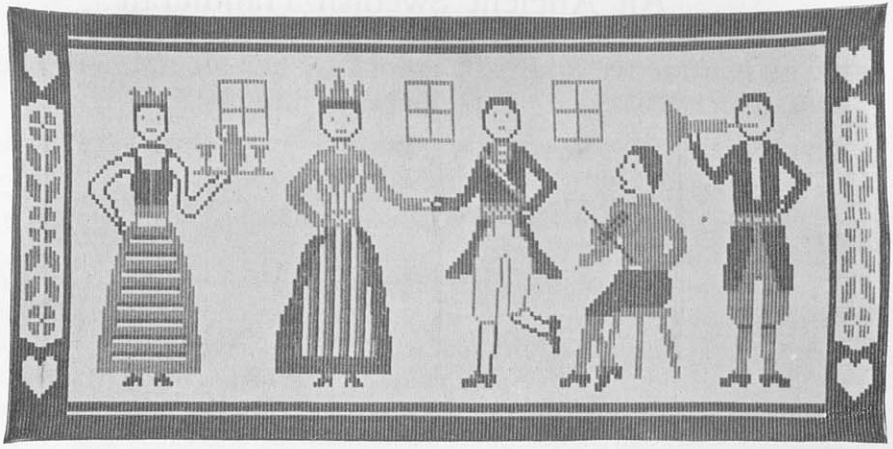
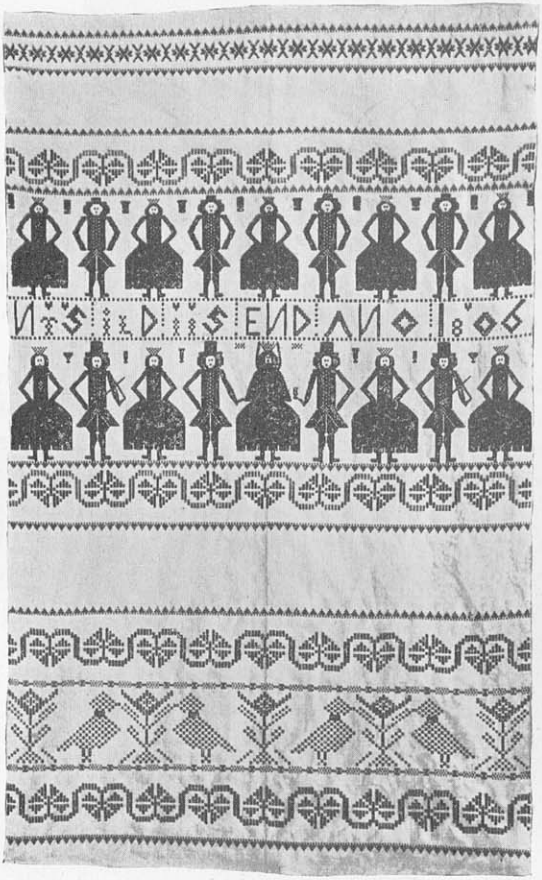
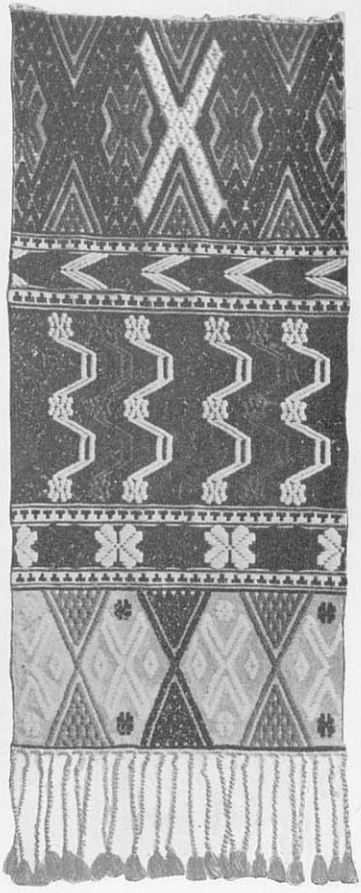
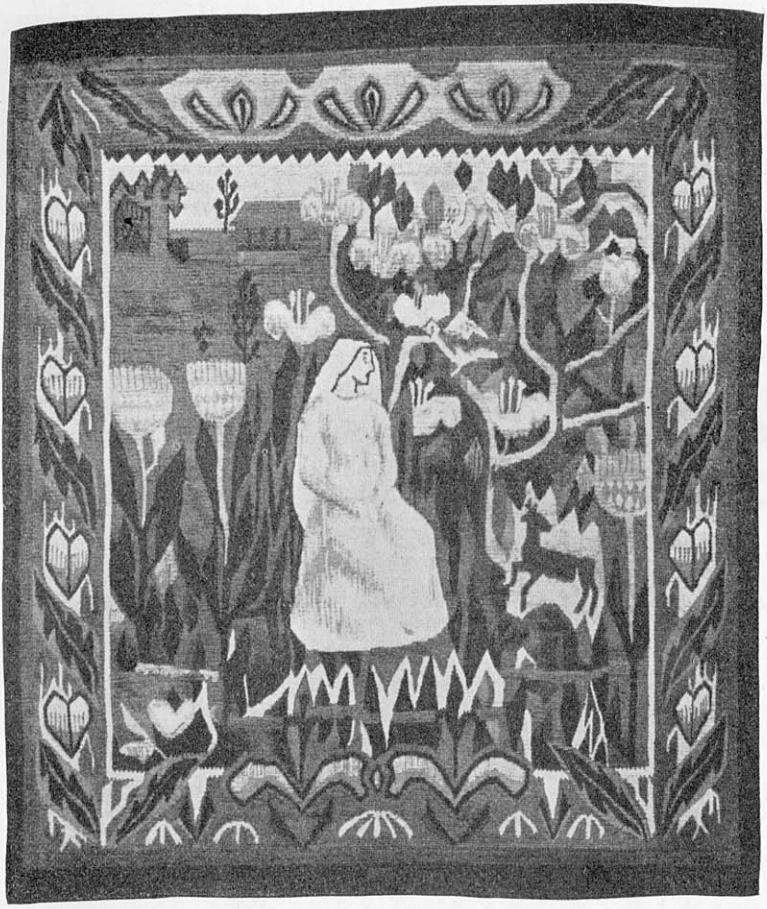
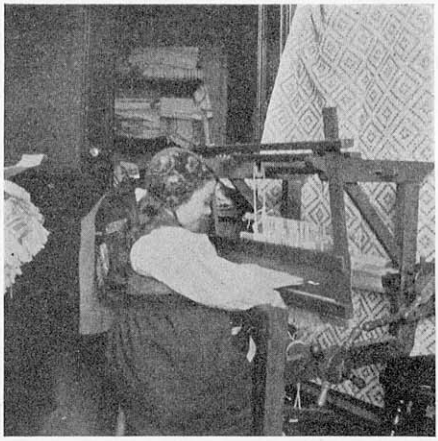
Number One, two views: Kindergarten Loom, made wide for weaving blankets, curtains and coverlets.

The warp is wound on the beam in the rear, and may be of worsted, linen or cotton thread, in any length desired. Each thread passes separately through the teeth of a reed comb. An appliance called "the harness," connected with treadles, partially regulates the different kinds of weaving. The shuttle and the batten do the remainder of the work. In fabrics so woven, a combination of worsted with linen or cotton is very effective, especially with a woof of heavy cords in cotton of two colors: the fabrics being designed for use as curtains, draperies and bedroom rugs.

Number Two: Wall-hanging in a pattern at least seven hundred years old. This fabric may be woven entirely in cotton, with the design in two colors, preferably red and blue. The scene represents a wedding party: the central figure being the bride wearing her crown, with the bridegroom clasping her hand at the left, and the clergyman, wine-glass in hand, at the right. The remaining figures are bridemaids, fiddlers and guests. The lower frieze or border shows a row of chickens intended to "furnish forth the marriage-table."

The value of this design lies in the fact that it is a monotype.

Number Three: This is also a wedding scene, representing the bride and the bridegroom dancing to the music of a horn-piper, while a maid holds a tray supporting decanter and punch-glasses. This fabric is executed in white cotton, with the design in red and blue.

Number Four: Tapestry Picture in Worsted. The subject of the picture is Saint Catherine, daughter of Saint Birgitta, the famous patron of Sweden. The landscape shows Alvastra Cloister in the distance, with the foreground blooming with flowers symbolical of the life of Saint Catherine so fertile and fragrant with good deeds. The saint is seated in the middle of the picture with her legendary attribute, the deer, which she is related to have saved from a hunting party. The serpent at her feet typifies temptations of the flesh overcome. Saint Catherine of Sweden in a measure parallels Saint Caecilia of the Roman Calendar, and is held as a type of virgin purity.

Number Five: Table Mat, "*Krabba Snar*" weaving; worsted, the colors being madder red and brilliant yellow. This distinctive weave, in order to be appreciated, needs to be examined in the fabric. It bears an untranslatable name, which is retained in the original Swedish.