CORN HUSK WEAVING: BY ELIZABETH PARKER

SINCE the increase of interest in country life and the things of the farm of late a great deal of intelligent comment is being made about a side of life that was getting sadly into a rut. All manner of interesting possibilities have been discovered in farm life, not the least interesting of which is the utilization of corn husks in making attractive and useful objects, and corn husk weaving has become a fad among the young folks in rural districts.

The husks used for this purpose are dried and plaited and then sewn into shape with strong linen thread.

An infinite variety of objects may be woven and the work is fascinating, because of the opportunity it furnishes for adding to beauty and comfort in life.

The husks of any kind of corn may be used, but they must be large and long or the work of joining the many ends not only becomes tedious, but the result is an ugly, bulging braid or plait.

A FRUIT BASKET WOVEN OF CORN HUSKS: FIG. 3.

The husks are stripped apart and laid smoothly in the sun to dry, for if used green the result is unsatisfactory. The very bulky, wood-like ends of the husks are cut away a little with shears and when they are being plaited these ends are joined by overlapping, and care is taken to tuck in any obtruding bits as one proceeds in order to keep the plait as smooth as possible, although a certain attractive unevenness will exist in spite of all one’s care, and this is really desirable. It is impossible to make a perfectly smooth, even plait, although some very fine braiding can be done with the soft pliable inner husks.

A CORN HUSK SCHOOL BASKET: FIG. 2.

One may plait as many strands as one desires, but the five and three strand braids have been proven the most practical, as the frequent joining of the other husks makes a braid of more strands very ugly and unwieldy.

For braiding one selects husks of a uniform width, the very wide ones may be stripped apart and made the correct width. Then one proceeds as one would in plaiting anything else. The farmers’ wives do it very easily as nearly all of them are accustomed to braid rags for rugs, and the process is the same.

When the braid is woven into the form desired, the edges are slightly overlapped and sewed through securely with linen thread waxed. These corn husk objects are firm and durable, and may be given hard daily usage, and as the work may be done with great rapidity the country housewife finds herself in possession of innumerable useful things at practically no expense. All kinds

A COVERED BASKET OF CORN HUSKS: FIG. 1.
of baskets may be made, and mats for the table and floor, hats of many shapes, trays and hampers and waste-baskets, picture frames, brush-broom holders, and knife boxes. There really seems no end to the things that may be fashioned out of the husks that often are regarded merely as waste or at best bedding in the stables. As even the smallest farm has its corn patch there is always an abundance of material to be had for the making of the husk braids.

Photographs of a few corn husk objects are given here to show the method of work. All these are of simple design and easy to make, giving an idea of what may be done in this line.

Fig. 1 shows a square covered box or basket, each side measuring seven inches in diameter, and consisting of six square pieces of the same size, made up separately and then sewed together at the edges, with the cover attached at one side only, with tapes for hinges and having a ring of the husk braid attached to the top as a handle. A basket like this may be made in a short evening and is a very useful thing to have about to hold various household things. It is, moreover, very ornamental and attractive, makes an excellent handkerchief or collar-box.

In making it, start each square from the center and work outward. The photograph is so clear that one can easily see how the work is done. Small, close stitches are taken with the waxed linen thread as they must not be allowed to show. The braid is made in the three-strand style.

Fig. 2 shows a flat basket made of husk braid in five strands.

To make this, a base is first fashioned in the shape of a long slender oval of about two rounds of the husk braid. When this is finished the sides are made by sewing the braid to the edge of the base at an angle of 45°, and so building on and on till one has one's basket high enough. At the top an extra row of the husk braid is laid on like a band, to strengthen the edge.

The handles are made of a close, firm braid in three strands, that is almost like a rope. This crosses the sides of the basket in two rows and passes beneath ending on each side in a loop for the handle.

Fig. 3 shows a basket for fruit, made of a very heavy braid, plaited in five strands of the heaviest of the husks. It is, in fact, a coarse basket for service.

It is made by forming the braid into a small-sized flat mat at the base and then gradually widening outward and upward. One gets to be expert in this charming art of forming the objects from the husk by a little practice. It may seem at the first trial to be a difficult thing to do, but it is really very simple and a child can learn to do it with a little
help at the start. The braid is woven looser or tighter in proceeding according to the shape desired. If one wants the object to spread larger at a certain point the braid is loosened; and to decrease the size of the object the braid is woven more closely.

Fig. 4 shows a charming three-cornered basket of husk braid. It consists of three side pieces and a triangular shaped cover and base.

This is a very easy model to follow, and when finished is very pretty as well as useful. One proceeds in the same fashion as with the square basket in Fig. 1. Each piece is fashioned separately and then joined together at the edges with linen thread. This model has a little flat loop of the husk attached to the point in front by which to lift the cover.

One may line such a box with silk or cretonne and thus make a charming work basket of it. It may be made in any size desired and in a five strand braid instead of one of three strands. This one measures six inches the length of each side, and two and a half inches high.

Fig. 5 shows a hat made of corn husks. It is only one of many shapes and styles that may be formed out of the husk braid with ease. It is of a five strand braid and the lighter, more pliable husks are selected to give comfort. It is bell-shaped and is started at the center of the crown, shaping from that point. Trimmed with a soft scarf it is very attractive and almost elegant. When such hats are trimmed with clusters of oats or wheat ears they are very charming. One farmer's daughter made pompons of dried thistle tops, a very graceful trimming indeed.

These hats may be made for men and boys as well as women; and automobile bonnets of the fine husk braid are very popular.

Fig. 6 shows some table mats made of very fine husks that have been bleached almost white in the sun. Only the oval and circular shapes are shown here, but one may make these mats square and oblong and diamond-shaped or rectangular.

Larger, rougher mats for the floor may be made of the coarser, heavier husks. These have, in fact, been made for years by farmers and their wives, and from them grew the idea of making more varied objects.

In Fig. 7 is shown a rather fascinating basket, made in a round pouch fashion, with a cover like a top. The husks here have been stained with dark green by mixing some green paint with varnish and staining them. This method gives a variety to the corn husk objects. Some prefer to dye the material before braiding with common cold dye stuffs, not the hot kind, as they would shrivel the husks and spoil them.

THE QUEST OF THE PICTURESQUE

For most of us the tyranny of circumstances has placed the pleasures of traveling out of reach. The wonders of Europe are familiar to us only at second hand. Venice is but a dream city whose canals and palaces we may read of but never see; the Orient, a modern version of the "Arabian Nights" which we cannot visit save through the magic of imagination.

But even in our New World setting, with all its crudeness, its commercialism, its lack of much historic background, those who have "eyes to see" can still discern the presence of the picturesque.

In the crowded streets of the metropolis, in the fantastic roof lines, the canion-like vistas, lurk a thousand possibilities of composition, color and design. The giant network of the bridges, the confusion of the wharfs, the glimpse of mast and funnel and passing sail, or the myriad colors of a marketplace where every fruit and vegetable seems like a dab of color on an artist's palette,—who can fail to feel their poetry, their power of suggestion, their possibilities for beauty? Even in the tall chimneys of a modern factory with grimy halo of smoke one feels the symbolism, the tremendous force of modern industry in which the magnificent and the sordid are so closely allied.

And in the country, where nature has not yet been dethroned, how can one help finding picturesqueness? Our hills, woods and meadows may lack ruined castles, historic legends and other Old World charms, but they still have the endless pageant of the seasons, the perpetual miracles of night and day, those subtle mysteries of the atmosphere whose magic veils can beautify the most prosaic landscape.

So every day and everywhere, if we only walk with seeing eyes, we may cultivate the artist's vision, and in the changing world about us, in summer or winter, in sunlight or shadow, through mist or rain, we may find some glimpse of loveliness, some fragment of the picturesque.