



Three generations in Fabricspun. The weaver, his daughter and his father

ADVENTURES WITH FABRICSPUN

By Roger Millen

I AM sure that a great many hand-loom weavers have long awaited the appearance on the market of a domestic yarn especially designed for the making of suiting fabrics and have, therefore, given the Fabricspun line a hearty welcome.

But whether we use this yarn for home consumption only or venture into a wider field, our efforts will hardly be worth while unless we make an earnest attempt to equal the best of the hand-woven suitings, both domestic and foreign, now on the market.

Since every yarn is, to some extent, a law unto itself, to achieve a result approaching perfection we must become acquainted with the advantages and limitations of each kind that we employ.

This may well lead to a very considerable amount of experiment and study, but the time and material devoted to such research is very well spent indeed.

Of course no two craftsmen employ a precisely similar technique in carrying out any given project. "What is one man's meat is another's poison!" The taste and temperament, the mental and physical make-up of each worker all combine to give handwork that individuality which is its major virtue. No set of arbitrary rules could be successfully applied in any field, but we can at least ob-

serve, experiment, and compare notes for the common good and the advancement of our craft. An individual who hoards his ideas very rarely has an idea worth sharing.

But let's to business. My own adventures with Fabricspun began some months ago and were largely based on the extremely informing and helpful article by Mr. Howard C. Ford which appeared in the *HANDICRAFTER* for March and April. He will forgive me, I am sure, if my experience prompts me (with the foregoing sentiments in mind) to offer one or two exceptions to the technique which he recommends.

My first warp was set 30 ends to the inch, using four heddle frames and threading double through a 15-dent reed. Weaving proved extremely difficult and troublesome. Although six feet tall and a bit over-weight, I put everything I had into the business of changing sheds. I was also quite unable to get a properly squared or balanced fabric. That is, while I had 30 warp threads to the inch I could not pound in more than about 16 of the weft. The resulting material was very handsome, to be sure, but practically a warp-faced fabric and not at all a true basket weave. A somewhat lighter warp seemed indicated, and a little experimenting revealed that a 22-dent reed, threaded single, made possible a perfectly balanced fabric.

At first glance it may seem a rather radical step from 30 ends to 22, but as a matter of fact I was able, with the new threading, to weave 44 balanced threads to the square inch instead of 46 badly out of balance. As the reed was threaded single, the warp was kept constantly combed out, and this, with the reduced number of threads, tended to make the sheds change very easily. Very few warp threads were broken, and as the total number of ends was reduced from 1,020 to 748, some time was saved in putting on the warp.

Knots in the warp will not pass readily through the 22-dent reed, but these must be tied back in any case. If many are encountered, they become a constantly increasing nuisance. One cannot be too particular, therefore, about keeping the warp free from knots. I use a sectional beam and formerly spooled the warp, winding on 44 threads at one time. I have abandoned this practice, however, in favor of a small warping rack. This method is somewhat slower than spooling, but insures a practically perfect warp and saves much time in weaving.

I have used Fabricspun both "in the oil" and scoured and, in respect to behavior and ease of

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Miniature Patterns for Hand-Weaving

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Weavers using six-treadle tie-up or working on table looms with rising shed can easily figure out the necessary changes in the drafts.

As was suggested in the article in the earlier issue of the HANDICRAFTER, the finer materials are the better medium for the development of the miniature patterns, though the coarser yarns can be used. Below is a summary of the materials mentioned in the former article.

Warp	Sley	Weft or tabby	Pattern
Linen 40/2	30	20	Linen Weaver or 18/2
" 50/2	45-48	25	Linen Special or heavier
Mercerized Perle Cotton 20	30-48	20	8 or 10

Among patterns for four-harness weaving, one great advantage in using a good miniature is the fact that the skips or floats are so short. This makes it a good sort of pattern for upholstery materials or linens where a long overshot does not give a good effect nor procure as durable a fabric as may be secured. Another good point is the ease with which one of these tiny patterns can be adapted to a wide variety of dimensions, making it very convenient to use in very small articles. It seems that the weaver of today is more inclined to the production of such things as bags, purses, small towels, cushions, etc., than to the making of the larger things, such as coverlets and couch covers. In the matter of rugs, the miniature is sometimes usable, as the short overshot is quite an asset in considering the wearing qualities of articles which come to such hard wear.

1932 Weaving Institute at Penland

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for him to do. Absolutely refusing any remuneration from the Penland organization either for his instruction or for the travelling expenses of himself and his family, his services are given wholly in the spirit of love and helpfulness. His only thought is to give to others generously, abundantly of that knowledge which he has spent almost a lifetime in acquiring, and his chief remuneration has been the joy which has come to him from the interest and appreciation of enthusiastic students.

Inquiries concerning next year's course were beginning to be received even before the Institute of this year was over, and now, almost nine months

in advance, reservations had been made for fifteen definite applicants. Those of us who are close to the Penland organization of weavers and to the life of the community cannot but feel awed at the astonishing rapidity of the growth of this project which was begun three years ago quite simply by a man who, out of admiration and esteem for Miss Morgan and her sixty-three mountain weavers, came to give them his best, which is the best the country has to offer.

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handling, cannot detect any difference. When woven in the scoured state, it may be washed and pressed without first being dry cleaned.

The advantages resulting from a final washing and pressing at the hands of a good laundry, as Mr. Ford recommends, cannot be over-emphasized. This treatment was quite new to me, and I tested it with some hesitation, but a single trial convinced me that handwork on material of this type cannot equal, nor even approach, the beautiful finish thus obtained.

I have found the shrinkage to be very slight, less than a quarter of a yard in a 7½-yard length of suiting in basket weave.

For the accompanying illustration my daughter wore a suit of Fabricspun woven in a plain twill on a rather fine linen warp set 30 to the inch. The other suits were all-Fabricspun basket weave on the 22 ends warp. To weave a twill or herringbone on the latter threading, the weft must be beaten in very lightly, but a pleasing and durable fabric results. For a firmer type of goods with a little more body, a rather fine tabby of wool or silk may be used. Homespun yarn woven in twill or herringbone on the Fabricspun warp makes an excellent cloth for top-coats.

New Chapters in the History of the Loom

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ingly refuse to make a choice from irrelevantly patterned textiles, with no relation to the integrated design he has conceived. The architect, too, will desire to call for a curtain, let us say, with stripes of such and such a color sequence, of such and such a number, width, and proportion.

The more personal and individual the design, the more specific becomes the architect's demand in the matter of textiles. The loom is not only an endeared echo from the past of handicraftsmanship; it becomes the tool of a new demand in the world.