

BASKET

ties. The word is of Britanno-Celtic origin and still subsists in the Welsh language in the form *Basgawd*, from *Basg*, plaiting, *met-work*: it was adopted into the Latin language in the 1st century with form little altered — *Bascauda*. The baskets made in Britain were highly prized by the Romans, and the poets Juvenal and Martial make mention of them as articles of no trifling value. They were evidently regarded as rare exotic curios in Juvenal's day, for the poet, in drawing an exaggerated picture of the shipwreck in which his friend Catullus threw overboard his most cherished possessions, couples *Bascaudæ* (baskets) with articles of chased silver wrought by famous artists (Sat. xii.). And Martial (xiv. 99) makes the British basket say of itself:—

Barbara de pictis veni bascauda Britannis,
Sed me jam mavult dicere Roma suam —

"The Basket Barbaric, I'm come from the painted
Britanni,
But Rome now would choose rather to title me Roman."

In primeval times basket-making was a branch of the art of weaving, and both of these arts grew out of the still more primitive one of wattling, first employed in making enclosures. Tylor ('Early History of Mankind') notes the existence of wicker-weaving among primitive tribes throughout the world. This is the first step in the art of weaving textile fabrics. It is practised, or rather was practised, by the natives of New Zealand and of northwestern America, and as late as 1856 by an Indian tribe living northwest of Lake Huron. In the lake habitations of Switzerland have been found specimens of wicker-weaving work consisting of strands of untwisted fibre, probably hemp, bound together by transverse strands wattled in among them; and in the same localities have been found specimens of the same kind of weaving but of a progressively higher and finer type. There is even a genetic relation between the arts of basket-making and pottery, proved by specimens of rude pottery found in all quarters of the world: in these are seen the impresses of the basket-work on which the clay was molded and which was burnt away in the kiln. Even after the art of molding the clay without the basket-work frame was invented, the potters seem to have imitated the markings left by it. Among the Indians of the Mississippi valley along the gulf, all pottery vessels of large size used to be modeled in baskets of willow or splints, which, being burnt off, their markings remained. Shields of basket-work covered with hide were in use among the Britons at the time of Cæsar's invasion, and similar shields are still employed by primitive peoples wherever they live in savage isolation. Boats, too, of basket-work, with a covering of hide (coracles), were used by the ancient Britons, and boats of the same type were seen by Herodotus (I. 194) navigating the Euphrates. These were of round form, without distinction of bow and stern, and similar boats are still in use on some rivers in India. On account of its lightness, combined with strength and durability, basket-work is preferred to joinery in the manufacture of various commodities, as window-screens, pony-carriage bodies, chairs, tables, etc. In South America the natives weave of rushes baskets capable of holding liquids, and those of Tasmania, now

Basket, a vessel made of osier twigs or other flexible materials, as rushes, strips of wood, splits of bamboo, rattan, etc., and used for holding and carrying all sorts of commodi-

extinct, used to weave of leaves water-tight vessels. The material most commonly employed in basket-making is the willow or ozier twig, and the production of this material is an important industry in France, Germany, Belgium, Holland, and Britain. The product of France and Britain is the most highly esteemed for firmness, toughness, and evenness; that of Germany is reputed inferior to the French; the Dutch product is in least esteem, being soft and pithy. Besides ozier twigs, a great variety of other materials are employed in basket-making. In this country coarse, strong baskets are made of shavings or long broad splits of various tough woods. In China and Japan the usual materials are bamboo and rattan, and the Chinese and Japanese excel in the manufacture of wares of these materials, their products being unrivaled for fineness, elegance, and finish; and some of their work, as in the encasing of the egg-shell porcelain of the Japanese is marvelous for the delicacy of the manipulation: even the examples seen in our marts, of common little porcelain saucers so encased in basket-work, are worthy of admiration for painstaking workmanship. The fronds of the Palmyra palm, originally employed in India in making "Cajan" baskets, now afford a staple material for use in the art throughout the world. So, too, *Phormium tenax*, native of New Zealand, which yielded to the natives of that country their peculiar basket-making material, is now employed in all countries for the same purpose.

Basket-making is one of the simplest of the mechanic arts; and the workman, in making baskets designed for use, not for ornament or to please the fancy, has no absolute need of tools or apparatus beyond those requisite for cutting the rods and interlacing them—a knife and a bodkin, with a mallet to beat them into place. The process can be learned in principle by inspection of a basket-maker at work in fashioning a basket from the foundation to the rim. Having provided a sufficient quantity of rods or splints of much greater length than the proposed dimensions of the finished work, he lays a number of them on the floor in parallel pairs at small intervals in the direction of the longer diameter of the basket: this is the woof, so to speak. Then these are crossed at right angles by two of the largest osiers, with their thick ends toward the workman, who sets his foot upon them; next, each of these is woven alternately over and under the lengthwise parallel pieces, and thus the parallel pieces are held fast; this is the "slath,"—the foundation. Now the end of one of the two transverse rods is woven over and under the lengthwise rods all round the bottom till that whole rod is worked in; and the same is done with the other transverse rod, and then additional long osiers are woven in till the bottom is of the required size. The bottom is now finished and work begins on the superstructure by driving the sharpened large ends of a sufficient number of long, stout osiers between the rods at the bottom from the edge toward the centre: these are the ribs or skeleton, being set up in the direction of the sides; between these ribs other rods are woven in till the structure reaches the desired height. To finish the edge the ends of the ribs are turned down over each other and thus compactly united. A handle is added by forcing two or three sharpened rods of

the requisite length down through the weaving of the sides, close together, and pinning them fast a little below the brim; the rods are then either bound or plaited in any way the workman chooses.

Our North American Indians were once among the most expert basket-weavers in the world. Now only the older Indians know the art, and certain tribes whose work was incomparably fine and beautiful have already lost it. After much pauperizing under the abominable reservation system, it was decided that the Indians needed an industry to save them from sinking still lower. Lace-making, after Brussels and French patterns, was first superimposed on a Minnesota reservation, whence it has spread. Now, lace-making, which has been developed by the European woman, fits her like a glove; and quite as truly, basket-making fits the Indian like a moccasin. Yet the Indians have succeeded at making lace, for they have remarkable skill with the fingers. An enlightened administrator of Indian affairs has taken up the task of human development in the right way and has made plans to revive basket-making by introducing it into the Government Indian schools, where the children, who now know nothing of this beautiful art, may learn from the only masters capable of teaching them—their own people, directed by white teachers who know the needs of the constantly widening market. Hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of baskets are imported from Japan and Germany every year—money which by every right should be earned by our capable and needy Indians; and better than the money they will earn is the satisfaction of doing what they do with surpassing skill.