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# MASTER WEAVER

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## CRAFT OR BUSINESS.

One can make living from handweaving but one cannot make money, unless one turns the craft into business. So from the very outset we have the choice of either remaining craftsmen and be satisfied with moderate (very moderate) returns, or going into the business. We shall try to discuss these both possibilities.

First: how to be a craftsman and still make your living?

The difficulty is obvious. A craftsman loves his craft first and his income next. He has a certain dignity exactly as an artist. A painter (I mean artist-painter) won't paint floors even if it brings him \$ 2 an hour, when his creative painting does not pay at all. A true craftsman feels alike. He will produce what he thinks is good, and he will sell it if he finds customers. But he won't base his production on the principle that anything which sells is good.

A craftsman should consider himself superior to any customer. He is here to educate the latter, to show him what he needs, and not to take orders or suggestions.

But to act thus, one has to be a good craftsman first. One cannot convince the customer to buy a certain article, unless one is quite sure that he knows what he is talking about. It has nothing to do with the customer's psychology - this comes into the "business" approach to hand-weaving, but it has plenty to do with the weaver's psychology. In other words the weaver, when selling anything must be very sure of the value of the article for sale, which in the last analysis comes to the fact that he must be sure of himself. And the only way of being sure, is to learn the trade.

Learning the trade does not mean only mastering the technical side of weaving. Although it is absolutely necessary, it is not sufficient. Leonardo da Vinci tried to reduce painting to a set of formulas - which worked well enough with him, but not with his pupils. Besides the technical training, there must be an artistic background, whether inborn, or acquired. If one is lucky enough to get this background so to speak for nothing, all the better - if not one has to work hard to acquire it by studying form and colour in painting, primitive art, folklore, history of textiles, and many other related branches of science - even physics and mathematics. What one should look for is not a set of rules, but a wider intuitive approach which finally leads one to such convictions as: I know that this is good, even if I cannot explain why it is so.

Once we reach this stage, we should be able to infect any customer with our enthusiasm for good, honest craftsmanship. Or send him to a mail-order house. .

Still, even at the best we shall find out that there are not enough customers to keep us going. This is a rule, although there may be exceptions, such as getting a top position in the textile industry as an inspired designer, who is above all the limitations imposed upon him by his bosses. The chance of becoming one of those is about the same as winning the Irish sweepstake. So if there are holes left in the budget left by a too low demand, we have to turn in other directions. An obvious alternative is teaching. If after years of struggle we could finally learn so much about our trade, why not make the same struggle easier for others? Teaching can have several directions: teaching at our own studio in groups, or individually, in a school (provided that enough freedom is left to the teacher), or lecturing. Each of these branches of teaching presents new problems: talking, demonstrating, dealing with people, understanding their difficulties. And again we have to learn, this time more about psychology than about weaving. Finally there is such a thing as teaching by written word. Publishing, giving correspondence courses, writing books, and what not. Again new problems and need for learning.

A combination of all these activities may give us a decent living, no temptation of ever becoming wealthy, and an endless opportunity for learning. Can there be a better life for a craftsman?

But what about those who start with the intention of making money rather than finding satisfaction in artistic self-expression? They certainly should concentrate on learning the technical side of the craft and better learn it thoroughly. Then instead of acquiring artistic background, they must learn what kind of articles sells best and why. Then the art of selling, Then the science of handling other people, who will work for them. This by the way does not mean how to pay them low wages, or it would not be a science. But even then they will have to possess a difficult to define ability of "feeling the market", of guessing fashions to come, the future prices, the possible output of competitors, and other factors like these.

The actual weaving will be performed not by expert weavers, who would be too expensive, but by "shuttle pushers" i.e. weavers who do not know much about the theory of weaving, and often not even about setting up the loom, but who certainly push the shuttle twice as fast as an expert craftsman. Why do they do it? Some take pride in their skill, and they are the best; some just want to make some money in their spare time, and sincere as they are (and cheap too) they are often a headache.

So you have to base all your production on fabrics simple to weave, but difficult to design. You do the designing, you experiment on the loom (unless you can afford an expert weaver who will do it for you), until you have a fabric which will fulfill all the requirements, technical, and economical. Then if your labour is rather unskilled in anything except in throwing the shuttle, you better prepare the warps for your weavers. You can afford to have one good warping mill which will do the work in a fraction of the time required by a weaver who has only a reel or a warping frame.

Since the price of a finished product depends largely on the time necessary to weave it, you must try to design your fabrics so,

That the pattern and colours will be rather in the warp, and the weaving will be performed with one shuttle. It is immaterial whether your weavers use flying shuttles or not. The difference in speed between a flying shuttle and a hand one is not as great as it is usually advertised. But the difference between one and two shuttles used alternately is enormous.

It becomes clear at this stage that the two classes of weavers - these who try to make money, and these who want remain true to the craft - are not a competition to each other. They produce different goods at different prices.

The industrial handweaving should not be condemned indiscriminately. Occasionally it develops into valuable and creative movement, like Rodier's organisation in France, or weaving communities in the British Isles. Such groups can supply weavers with equipment which they could never afford working on their own, and thus produce textiles too expensive to make for both the power loom, and the individual craftsman.

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## DROPPED WEAVES

There is a whole group of weaves in which the pattern (usually of the spot type) is produced by small parts of the fabric not being woven. It means that in the blocks of pattern the warp and weft are not interwoven at all - they form floats: horizontal on one side of the fabric and vertical on the other. The difference between the plain Spot Weaves (Bronson, etc) and Dropped Weaves is that in the first case the floats are separated by tabby, and in the second they are not. The first impression is that such a fabric would be extremely flimsy, since a certain part of it is not woven, but in practice as much as 50% of the cloth may remain unwoven, and still the whole is quite firm, although rather soft. This principle of "dropping the stitches" as it were, to produce either pattern or a soft texture, may be applied to any basic weave, particularly to tabby and twill.

When weaving simple patterns or texture, an ordinary loom, preferably a jack-type, counterbalanced with shed regulator, or a double tie-up can be used. With more involved patterns too many frames are necessary and it is easier to use a pattern harness (see MW No.7). For plain tabby in the ground 2 frames are needed for each block of pattern plus two for the ground (i.e. 10 for 4-block pattern). For 3:1 twill we must have 4 frames for each block plus 4 for the ground which means 20 frames for 4 blocks. The 2:1 twill takes only 3 frames per block and ground, or 15 for 4 blocks.

To avoid very long floats the blocks of pattern should not be combined, i.e. two or more blocks should not be woven at the same time, unless they are very small or separated by the ground. We shall return to this problem later on.

The simplest possible case of dropped weaves is dropped tabby woven on 4 frames. It gives either: a 2-block texture, single block spot pattern, or a single block all-over pattern.