

From Household Words.

SHAWLS.

In that part of Asia where some of our brave countrymen have penetrated only to die—in that country where Charles Stoddart and his friend Connolly, whose faces will never be forgotten by some of us, and whose voices still sound in our ears, consoled each other through a loathsome imprisonment, and went out together to lose their heads in the market-place of the capital; in that distant and impracticable country of Bokhara, which we are ready to say we will never have any connexion with—there are people always employed in our service. We are not now thinking of the Bokhara clover, which is such a treat to our cows and horses. We owe that, and lucerne, and others of our green crops, to the interior of Asia; but we are thinking of something more elaborate. In Bokhara, the camel is watched while the fine hair on the belly is growing: this fine hair is cut off so carefully that not a fibre is lost; it is put by until there is enough to spin into a yarn, unequalled for softness; and then it is dyed all manner of bright colors, and woven in strips eight inches wide of shawl patterns, such as—with all our pains and cost, with all our Schools of Design and study of nature and art—we are not yet able to rival. These strips are then sewn together so cunningly that no European can discover the joins. The precious merchandise is delivered to traders who receive it on credit. On their return from market they pay the price of the shawls at the Bokhara value, with 30 per cent. interest; or, if they cannot do this, in consequence of having been robbed, or of any other misfortune, they stay away, and are never seen again in their native land.

Where is this market? So far away from home that the traders wear out their clothes during their journey; and their fair skins become as brown as mulattoes. On, on, on they go, day after day, month after month, on their pacing camels, or beside them, over table-lands, mounting one above another; over grass, among rocks, over sand, through snows; now chilled to the marrow by icy winds; now scorched by sunshine, from which there is no shelter but the flat cotton caps, with which they thatch their bare crowns: on, on, for fifteen thousand miles, to the borders of Russia, to sell the shawls which are to hang on ladies' shoulders in Hyde Park, and where beauties most do congregate in Paris and Vienna.

The passion for shawls among all women everywhere is remarkable. In one country, the shawl may flow from the head, like a veil; in another, it hangs from the shoulders; in another, it is knotted round the loins as a sash; in yet another, it is swathed round the body as a petticoat. Wherever worn at all, it is the pet article of dress. From a time remote beyond computation, the sheep of Cashmere have been cherished on their hills, and the goats of Thibet on their plains, and the camels of Tartary on their steppes, to furnish material for the choicest shawls. From time immemorial, the patterns which we know so well have been handed down as a half-sacred tradition through a Hindoo ancestry, which puts even Welsh pedigrees to shame. For thousands of years have the bright dyes, which are the despair of our science and art, been glittering in Indian looms, in those primitive pits under the palm-tree where the whimsical patterns grow, like the wild flower springing from the soil. For thousands of years have Eastern poten-

tates made presents of shawls to distinguished strangers, together with diamonds and pearls.

At this day, when an Eastern prince sends gifts to European sovereigns, there are shawls, to the value of thousands of pounds, together with jewels, perfumes, and wild beasts, and valuable horses; just as was done in the days of the Pharaohs, as the paintings on Egyptian tombs show us at this day. And the subjects of sovereigns have as much liking for shawls as any queen. At the Russian Court, the ladies judge one another by their shawls as by their diamonds. In France, the bridegroom wins favor by a judicious gift of this kind. In Cairo and Damascus, the gift of a shawl will cause almost as much heart-burning in the harem as the introduction of a new wife. In England, the daughter of the house spends the whole of her first quarter's allowance in the purchase of a shawl. The Paris grisette, and the London dressmaker go to their work with the little shawl pinned neatly at the waist. The lost gin-drinker covers her rags with the remnants of the shawl of better days. The farmer's daughter buys a white cotton shawl, with a gay border, for her wedding; and it washes and dyes until, having wrapped all her babies in turn, it is finally dyed black to signalize her widowhood. The maiden-aunt, growing elderly, takes to wearing a shawl in the house in mid-winter; and the granny would no more think of going without it at any season than without her cap. When son or grandson comes home from travel, far or near, his present is a new shawl, which she puts on with deep consideration; parting with the old one with a sigh. The Manchester or Birmingham factory girl buys a gay shawl on credit, wears it on Sunday, puts it in pawn on Monday morning, and takes it out again on Saturday night, for another Sunday's wear, and so on, until she has wasted money that would have bought her a good wardrobe. Thus, from China round the world to Oregon, and from the queen down to the pauper, is the shawl the symbol of woman's taste and condition. Whence come all these shawls? For it is clear that the supply which arrives from Asia over bleak continents and wide oceans, can be only for the rich and great. Some of the shawls from Bokhara sell, in the market on the Russian frontier, for two thousand four hundred pounds each. Whence come the hundred thousand shawls that the women of Great Britain purchase every year?

Some of the richest that our ladies wear are from Lyons; and the French taste is so highly esteemed that our principal manufacturers go to Lyons once or twice a year, for specimens and patterns. Some of our greatest ladies of all, even the queen and certain duchesses and countesses, offer to our chief manufacturers a sight of their treasures from India, their Cashmeres, and other shawls, from a patriotic desire for the improvement of our English patterns. From these, the manufacturers of Norwich and Paisley devise such beautiful things that, but for the unaccountable and unrivalled superiority of the Orientals in the production of this particular article, we should be all satisfaction and admiration. The common cotton shawls, continually lessening in number, worn by women of the working-classes, are made at Manchester, and wherever the cotton manufacture is instituted. In order to study the production of British shawls in perfection, one should visit the Norwich or Paisley manufactories.

If any article of dress could be immutable, it would be the shawl; designed for eternity in the

unchanging East; copied from patterns which are the heirloom of a caste, and woven by fatalists, to be worn by adorers of the ancient garment, who resent the idea of the smallest change. Yet has the day arrived which exhibits the manufacture of three distinct kinds of shawls in Paisley. There is the genuine woven shawl, with its Asiatic patterns; and there is that which is called a shawl for convenience, but which has nothing Asiatic about it; the tartan—which name is given not only to the checks of divers colors which signify so much to the Scottish eye, but to any kind of mixed or mottled colors and fabric—woven in squares or lengths to cover the shoulders. The third kind is quite modern; the showy, slight and elegant printed shawl, derived from Lyons, and now daily rising in favor. The woven kind is the oldest in Paisley. The tartan kind was introduced from Stirlingshire—without injury to Stirlingshire—which makes as many as ever, but to the great benefit of Paisley. The printed kind has been made about six years; and it is by far the greatest and most expanding manufacture. The most devoted worshippers of the genuine shawl can hardly wonder at this, considering the love of change that is inherent in ladies who dress well, and the difference of cost. A genuine shawl lasts a quarter of a lifetime. Ordinary purchasers give from one pound to ten pounds for one, and can give more if they desire a very superior shawl; a process which it is not convenient to repeat every two or three years. The handsomest printed shawls, meantime, can be had for two pounds, and they will last two years; by the end of which time, probably, the wearer has a mind for something new. The time required for the production answers pretty accurately to these circumstances. It takes a week to weave a shawl of the genuine sort; in the same time ten or twelve of the tartan or plaid, and twenty or thirty of the printed can be produced.

The processes employed for these three kinds of shawls are wholly different; and we will therefore look at them separately, though we saw them, in fact, under the same roof. As for the tartan shawls, there is no need to enlarge upon them, as their production is much like that of any other kind of variegated cloth. We need mention only one fact in regard to them, which is, however, very noticeable; the recent invention of a machine by which vast time and labor are saved. As we all know, the fringes of cloth shawls are twisted—some threads being twisted together in one direction, and then two of these twists being twisted in the opposite direction. Till a month ago this work was done by girls, in not the pleasantest way, either to themselves or the purchaser, by their wetting their hands from their own mouths, and twisting the threads between their palms. The machine does, in a second of time, the work of fourteen pairs of hands; that is, as two girls attend it, there is a saving of twelve pairs of hands and some portion of time, and the work is done with thorough certainty and perfection; whereas, under the old method, for one girl who could do the work well, there might be several who did it indifferently or ill. The machine, invented by Mr. Hutchison, must be seen to be understood; for there is no giving an idea, by description, of the nicety with which the brass tongues rise to lift up the threads and to twist them; then throw them together, and rub them against the leather-covered shafts, which, instead of human palms, twist them in the opposite direction. In seeing this

machine the old amazement recurs at the size, complication, and dignity of an instrument contrived for so simple a purpose. The dignity, however, resides not in the magnitude of the office, but in the saving of time and human labor.

Of the other two kinds of shawls, which shall we look at first? Let it be the true and venerable woven shawl.

The wool is Australian or German—chiefly Australian. It comes, in the form of yarn, from Bradford, in hanks which are anything but white, so that they have first to be washed. Of the washing, dyeing, and warping we need not speak, as they are much the same to the observer's and therefore to the reader's eye, as the preparation of yarns for carpets in Kendal, and of silk for ribbons in Coventry. While the washing and drying, and the dyeing and drying again are proceeding, the higher labor of preparing the pattern is advancing.

But how much of the lower kind of work can be done during the slow elaboration of the higher! It really requires some patience and fortitude even to witness the mighty task of composing and preparing the pattern of an elaborate shawl. Let the reader study any three square inches of a good shawl border; let the threads be counted, and the colors, and the twists and turnings of the pattern; and then let it be remembered that the general form has to be invented, and the subdivisions, and the details within each form, and the filling up of the spaces between, and the colors—as a whole, and in each particular; and that, before the material can be arranged for the weaving, every separate stitch (so to speak) must be painted down on paper in its right place. Is it not bewildering to think of! Much more bewildering and imposing is it to see. As for the first sketch of the design, that is all very pretty; and, the strain on the faculties not being cognizable by the stranger, is easy enough. There goes the artist-pencil—tracing waving lines and elegant forms, giving no more notion of the operations within than the hands of a clock do of the complication of the works. Formerly, the employers put two or three good foreign patterns into the artists' hands, and said, "Make a new pattern out of these." Now that we have Schools of Design, and more accessible specimens of art, the direction is given without the aids. "Make a new pattern;" and the artist sits down with nothing before him but pencil and paper—unless, indeed, he finds aids for himself in wild flowers, and other such instructors in beauty of form and color. By degrees, the different parts of the pattern shape themselves out, and combine—the centre groups with the ends, and the ends grow out into the sides with a natural and graceful transition. Then the portions, properly outlined, are delivered to the colorers; who cover the drawing with oiled paper, and begin to paint. It would not do to color the outlined drawing, because there are no outlines in the woven fabric. It is dazzling only to look upon. Much less minute is the transferring to the diced paper which is the real working pattern. The separate portions of the finished pattern of a single shawl, when laid on the floor, would cover the carpet of a large drawing-room. The taking down such a pattern upon paper occupies four months.

The weaving is done either by "lashing," or from Jacquard cards. The Jacquard loom answers for the eternal patterns, and the "lashing" method suffices for those which are not likely to be repeated. The man seated at the "piano-machine," playing

on a sort of keys, from the colored patterns stuck up before his eyes, is punching the Jacquard cards, which are then transferred, in their order, to the lacing-machine, where they are strung together by boys into that series which is to operate upon the warp in the weaving, lifting up the right threads for the shuttle to pass under to form the pattern, as in other more familiar manufactures. The "lashing" is read off from the pattern, too, in the same way as with carpet patterns at Kendal; so many threads being taken up and interlaced with twine for a red stitch, and then so many more for a green, and so on. Boys then fasten each symbol of a hue to a netting of whipcord, by that tail of the netting which, by its knots, signifies that particular hue; so that, when the weaving comes to be done, the boy, pulling the symbolic cord, raises the threads of the warp—green, blue, or other,—which are required for that throw of the shuttle. Thus the work is really all done beforehand, except the mere putting together of the threads; done, moreover, by anybody but the weaver, who is, to say the truth, a mere shuttle-throwing machine. The poor man does not even see and know what he is doing. The wrong side of the shawl is uppermost; and not even such a wrong side as we see, which gives some notion of the pattern on the other. Previous to cutting, the wrong side of a shawl is a loose surface of floating threads of all colors; of the threads, in fact, which are thrown out of the pattern, and destined to be cut away and given to the paper-makers to make coarse gray paper. One pities the weaver, who sits all day long throwing the shuttle, while the boy at the end of his loom pulls the cords which make the pattern, and throw up nothing but refuse to the eye. He has not even the relief of stopping to roll up what he has done; for a little machine is now attached to his loom, which saves the necessity of stopping for any such purpose. It is called "the up-taking motion." By it a few little cog-wheels are set to turn one another, and, finally, the roller, on which the woven fabric is wound as finished.

The bundles of weaving-strings and netting, which regulate the pattern, are called "flowers." From the quantity of labor and skill wrought up in their arrangement, they are very valuable. A pile of them, on a small table, were, as we were assured, worth one thousand pounds. We may regard each as the soul or spirit of the shawl,—not creating its material, but animating it with character, personality, and beauty. We have said that it takes a man a week to weave a shawl; but this means a "long" shawl, and not a "square." The square remain our favorites; but the female world does not seem to be of our mind. It is true the symmetry of the pattern is spoiled when the white centre hangs over one shoulder. It is true, the "longs" are heavy and very warm, from being twice doubled. But they have one advantage which ladies hold to compensate for those difficulties; they can be folded to any size, and therefore to suit any figure—tall or short, stout or thin. We are assured that, for one square shawl that is sold, there are a hundred "longs."

A capital machine now intervenes, with its labor-saving power; this time, of French invention. Formerly, it took two girls a whole day to cut off the refuse threads from the back of a shawl. But this machine, superintended by a man, does it in a minute and a half. A horizontal blade is traversed by spiral blades fixed on a cylinder, the revolving of which gives to the blades the

action of a pair of scissors. The man's office is to put in the shawl, set the machine going, and to beat down the refuse as fast as it is cut off.

The upper surface of the shawl remains somewhat rough—rough enough to become soon a rather dirty article of dress, from the dust which it would catch up and retain. It is therefore smoothed by singeing. This very offensive process is performed by a man who must have gone through a severe discipline before he could endure his business. He heats his iron (which is like a very large, heavy knife, turned up at the end) red-hot, spreads the shawl on a table rather larger than itself, and passes the red-hot iron over the surface, with an even and not very rapid movement. What would that Egyptian dragoman have said, who, being asked to iron out an English clergyman's white ducks, burned off the right leg with the first touch of his box-iron? That box-iron was not red-hot, nor anything like it; yet there is no such destruction here. There is only the brown dust fizzing. Pah! that's enough! let us go somewhere else.

In a light, upper room, women and girls are at work, sitting on low stools, each with a shawl stretched tightly over her knees. Some of these are darning, with the utmost nicety, any cracks, thin place, or "faults" in the fabric; darning each in its exact color. Some are putting silk fringes upon the printed shawls, tacking them in with a needle, measuring each length by eye and touch, and then knotting, or, as it is called, "netting" the lengths by cross-ties. One diminutive girl of nearly ten, is doing this with wonderful quickness, as she sits by her mother's knee. The girls do not come to work before this age; nor the boys before twelve. In other rooms, women are seated at tables, or leaning over them, twisting the fringes of plaid shawls, or picking out knots and blemishes with pincers, and brushing all clean, and then folding them, with sheets of stiff paste-board between, ready for the final pressure in the hydraulic press, which makes them fit for the shop.

The fabric for the printed shawls is light and thin, in comparison with the woven. The thinness is various; from the *barége* to the lightest gossamer that will bear the pressure of the block. The whole importance of the production consists in the printing; for the fabric is simple and common enough. A man can weave ten yards per day of the *barége*; and the silk gauze, striped or plain, requires no particular remark.

The designing is done with the same pains and care as for the genuine shawl, but the range of subjects is larger. While something of the Oriental character of the shawl patterns must be preserved, much of the beauty of French figured silks and brocades and embroidery may be admitted. Thus the designing and coloring-rooms contain much that pleases the eye, though one does not see there the means and appliances which fill some apartment or other of Birmingham factories—the casts from the antique, the volumes of plates, the flower in water, and so on. The preparation of the blocks for printing, and, yet more, the application of them, reminded us of the paper-staining, which we had certainly never thought of before in connexion with shawls. The wood used is lime-wood. Some of the blocks are chiselled and picked out, like those of the paper-stainer. The cast-blocks are more curious. A punch is used, the point or needle of which is kept hot by a flame, from which the workman's head is defended by a shield of metal. He burns holes by puncturing with this

hot needle along all the outlines of the block he holds in his hands, much as a little child pricks outlines on paper on a horse-hair chair-bottom. There is a groove along the face of each block, to allow the metal to run in. The burned blocks are screwed tight in a press, their joined tops forming a saucer, into which the molten metal (composed of tin, bismuth and lead) is poured. In it goes, and down the grooves, penetrating into all the burnt holes; and, of course, when cool, furnishing a cast of the patterns desired, in the form of upright thorns or spikes on a metallic ground or plate. These plates are filed smooth at the back, and fixed on wood, and you have the blocks ready to print from; one representing one color, another another, and so on, till the plates for a single shawl of many colors may mount up in value to a very large sum.

Before printing, the fabric has been well washed; the *barége* being passed, by machinery, over cylinders which apply and squeeze out a wash of soap, soda and glue. All roughnesses had previously been removed by a "cropping" machine. After drying, it comes to the printing-table, where it is treated much like a paper-hanging. This is all very well; but what is to be done in case of a shower of rain? a not improbable incident in the life of a shawl. A paper-hanging would not stand a driving rain. Are ladies imposed upon in this matter, when they are offered a gay-printed shawl as wearable out of doors? By no means. Nobody knows how it is, but the fact is certain, that a good steaming, at a tremendous heat, fixes the colors by some chemical action, without in the least hurting their lustre; so the shawls go into the steaming-box, and come out of it able to bear as many washings as you please, without any change of color. After drying, in a heat of one hundred and ten degrees, they go upstairs to be surveyed, fringed, folded and pressed.

It seems a pity that the fat, easy, lazy Bokharian, and the slim, lithe, patient Hindoo, should not come to Paisley, and see how shawls are made there. To the one, shaving his camel on the plain, and the other, throwing his antique shuttle under the palm, how strange would be the noise, and the stench, and the speed, and the numbers employed, and the amount of production! To the one, it may be the work of years to furnish to the travelling merchant strips of eight inches wide, enough to make a shawl; and, to the other, the production of such an article is an event in life; while here, at Paisley, if the pattern requires months, the weaving of the most genuine and venerable kind occupies only a week. We do not believe that the simple and patient Oriental will be driven out of the market by us, because there is no promise, at present, of our overtaking their excellence. We hope there will be room in the world of fashion for them and us forever—the "forever" of that world.) We shall not go back to their methods, and it is not very likely that they should come up to ours; so we shall probably each go on in our own way, which is what everybody likes best.