

MANUFACTURE OF KASHMIR SHAWLS.

ALL the thread used in making a large pair of shawls does not weigh more than fifteen or twenty pounds English, and may be purchased for 120 to 150 small rupis. After the thread is dyed, it is dipped in rice-water, a process which makes it stronger, and fits it to be more safely moved by the shuttle, and the stiffness is removed by washing. The undyed shawl-stuff, which sells at five rupis the yard, is called ubra, from ubr (a cloud), or alwan-i-sadah (without colour), if white; and if a border be worked on it, the remaining white is called mutun. Alwan, as the shawl stuff is called when free from ornament, is not often, if ever, made up by the Kashmiri weavers of the natural colour of the poshm, and may be, of course, dyed of any colour, red, blue, green, yellow, &c. When made with coloured stripes or flowers on it, the chograh of the Afghans, or al-khalek, the long undercoat of the Persians, is made from it. If the pattern be worked with the needle, the shawl is far inferior, in every respect, to those in which the pattern is woven in. An excellent pair of the former description may be purchased in Kashmir for 150 rupis (about 10*l.*), whereas an equally good pair of the

usuleh (the real), or the latter kind, could not be procured for less than 700 or 800 rupis. The productions of the Kashmirian looms, which are of old and unimproved construction, are very numerous: du shalah, or two shawls, they being always made in pairs; jamaweh, for bedding; rumal, or handkerchiefs; hasheyi, or the shawl of a coloured ground with a small border; urruk, resembling very strong nankin; and the yek-tar (one-thread), a most light and beautiful fabric, being of about one-half the thickness of the common shawl, and which I was told was invented for the Sikh turbans. Besides the above, gloves and socks are manufactured from the shawl wool; but they also make gulbudun, or red silk cloth for ladies' trowsers, and chikun, or flowers worked in silk upon a cotton ground, similar to those procurable at Multan. Sashes and trowsers-strings are also made from silk; whilst lungehs, or pieces of blue cloth for turbans, and kumurbunds, or waist-cloths, are prepared from cotton; and rugs, and horsecloths, &c., from wool. A cloth called siling is manufactured from the shawl wool in Yarkund and China; it somewhat resembles a coarse English kerseymere in texture. As soon as a shawl is made, notice is given to the inspector, and none can be cut from the loom but in his presence. It is then taken to the custom-house and stamped, a price is put upon it by the proper officer, and 25 per cent. on the price is demanded. When it is purchased, and about to leave the valley with its owrier, the latter has to pay another four rupis for permit duty, and another seal, which enables him to pass with his property; but he is subjected to further duties at Jamu and Umritsir. It becomes necessary to wash the shawls, in order to deprive them of the stiffness of the rice-starch remaining in the thread, and for the purpose of softening them generally. The best water for this use is found in the canal between the lake and the floodgates at the Drogjun. Some ruins, in large limestone blocks, are lying on the washing-place, and in one of these is a round hole, about a foot and a half in diameter, and a foot in depth; in this the shawl is placed, and water being poured over it, it is stamped on by the naked feet for about five minutes, and then taken into the canal, by a man standing in the water; one end is gathered up in his hand, and the shawl swung round and beaten with great force upon a flat stone, being dipped into the canal between every three or four strokes. This occupies about five minutes. They are then dried in the shade, as the hot sun spoils the colours; and, in ten days afterwards, the coloured shawls undergo a similar process, but occupying less time. The white ones, after being submitted to the process, on the first day are spread in the sun, and bleached by water sprinkled over them; they then are again treated in the same process as the coloured shawls, being stamped upon and beaten a second time, and then bleached again till they are dry, and then for a third time beaten, stamped upon, and finally dried in the sun. In the second time of stamping, soap is sometimes used, but is not good generally, and is never used for the coloured shawls, as the alkali might affect the colours. There is something in the water of the canal which certainly communicates to the shawl a softness which cannot be given to those manufactured at any place in the plains of Hindustan. At the same time, those made in Paris or at Norwich would be, I think, as soft, were it not for the greater closeness of texture, consequent upon their being made by a machine instead of the hand. For the same reason it is well known that the calico made in India is much softer, and is much more durable, than that made in England. There are plenty of wells in the city, and in every case where there is a bath on the premises, as water is found by digging only five or six yards below the surface. It is not good, but often, if I mistake not, brackish, and in some instances is preferred for the washing of the red shawls. Old shawls that require cleaning, and in some instances, new ones, are washed by means of the freshly-gathered root of a parasitical plant called kritz. A pound of it is bruised and mixed with about three pints of water, and to this is added a mixture of pigeon's dung (a piece equal in size to a turkey's egg) mixed and beaten up with about the same quantity of water, and the shawl is saturated with the liquor, and then stamped upon, washed with the hand, and then well steeped in the canal. In the plains, the berries of the raynti fruit, stirred up with water, yet not so as to form a lather, are used for washing a soiled shawl. A smaller root, known also by the name of kritz, is often used for cotton clothes. The colours of a shawl, after it has been washed, are often renewed so well as to deceive any but the initiated, by pricking them in again with a wooden pin dipped in the requisite tints. The fine pale yellow colour of a new shawl is given by

means of sulphur fumes. A hole is made in the floor about a foot in diameter, and six inches in depth. Over this is placed a small square chimney of poplar-wood, open, of course, above. Some lighted charcoal is put into the hole, and over it is sprinkled a small handful of bruised sulphur. Around the chimney, and about two feet distance from it, is placed a horse or framework, about five feet six inches in height, upon which four shawls are suspended, and the external air is further excluded by another drawn over the top. When the sulphur is consumed, the shawls are withdrawn, and others are subjected to the fumes of fresh sulphur. They are kept until the next day, then washed again in water, dried and pressed, several together, between two boards. The mokym, or broker, who transacts business between the shawl manufacturer and the merchant, is a person of great importance in the city, and the manner in which their transactions are carried on is rather singular. They have correspondents in most of the large cities of Hindustan, whose business is to collect and forward every species of information connected with their trade. By their means they seldom fail to hear of any saudagur, or merchant, who is about to start for Kashmir, even from such a distance as Calcutta, and, if he be a rich man, the mokym will send as far as Delhi to meet him, and invite him to become his guest during his sojourn in the valley. Perhaps, again, when the merchant, half dead with fatigue and cold, stands at length on the snowy summit of the Pir Panjal, or either of the other mountain-passes, he is suddenly amazed by finding there a servant of the broker, who has kindled a fire ready for his reception, hands him a hot cup of tea and a kabab, a delicious kaliaun, and a note containing a fresh and still more pressing invitation from his master. Such well-timed civility is irresistible; his heart and his boots thaw together, and he at once accepts the hospitality of the mokym, who, it may be, is awaiting the traveller with a friendly hug at the bottom of the pass, two or three days' journey from the city, to which he obsequiously conducts him. He finds himself at home at the house of his new friend, and himself and servants studiously provided with all he can require. His host, of course, takes care to repay himself in the end. He has an understanding with the shawl manufacturers who frequent his house, so that his guest is at the mercy of both parties, and should he quarrel with the broker, and hope to make a purchase without his intervention, he would find it impossible. No shawl-vender can by any possibility be induced to display his stores until the approach of evening, being well aware of the superior brilliancy imparted to their tints by the slanting rays of the setting sun; and, when the young saudagur has purchased initiation by experience, he will observe that the shawl is never exhibited by one person only; that the broker, perhaps, apparently inattentive, is usually sitting by, and that, under pretence of bringing the different beauties of the shawl under his most especial notice, a constant and free-masonic fire of squeezes and pinches, having reference to the price to be asked, and graduated from one hundred to a five rupi power, is secretly kept up between the venders, by means of their hands extended under the shawl. When the merchant has completed his purchase, the mokym, who was before so eager to obtain him as a guest, pays him the compliment of seeing him safe to the outside of the city, where he takes leave of him at Chaturbul, the very last place within it; from which custom the brokers have obtained the cant name of Dost-i-Chaturbul, or the "Chaturbul friends." The fool's-cap or cypress-shaped ornament so commonly worked on the shawls is a representation of the jigh, or kashkch, or aigrette of jewels which is worn on the forehead in the East. Every great man now wears one, but when the Patans were in the zenith of their power under Timour Shah it was the privilege of royalty only.—From G. T. Vigne's *Travels in Kashmir*.