

Herodotus states that weaving in Egypt was the occupation of men only, not of women, and declares that the woof was always worked upwards by the Egyptians, and not downwards, as by other nations; ²²³ but the native monuments show that men and women were alike employed both in spinning and weaving (Fig. 175), and that the woof was worked indifferently either up or down. ²²⁴ The Egyptian loom was of the most primitive description, ²²⁵ the shuttle being passed across by the hand and not thrown, and all the needful movements being effected entirely by the weaver himself, who, if a man, ordinarily sat in front of his frame.

It is wonderful what exquisite fabrics were produced by these simple means. The Egyptians worked in linen, in cotton, and in wool, producing good results in every case; but their favorite textile manufacture was that of linen, and it is in this branch that their fabrics are most remarkable. ²²⁶ The fineness of some equals that of the best Indian muslin, ²²⁷ while of others it is said that "in touch they are comparable to silk, and in texture to our finest cambric." ²²⁸ Originally the linen was extremely white; ²²⁹ but sometimes it was dyed red, ²³⁰ and at other times the edges were colored with indigo, either in a single line or in several stripes. ²³¹ Patterns were occasionally inwrought during the weaving, ²³² while sometimes they were superadded by a process analogous to that which in modern times is called printing. ²³³ Gold threads were also in some cases introduced to give additional richness to the fabric, ²³⁴ which was often as transparent as lawn ²³⁵ and of silky softness.

The poet who bewails the misery of the "little laborer" has a word of lamentation for the weaver likewise. "The weaver," he says, ²³⁶ "inside the houses is more wretched than a woman; his knees are at the place of his heart; he has not tasted the air. Should he have done but a little in a day, of his weaving,

he is dragged as a lily in a pool. He gives bread to the porter at the door, that he may be allowed to see the light." Confinement, close rooms, a cramped position, are no doubt evils; but they are common to many handicrafts and scarcely separable from that of the hand-loom weaver. So far, then, the Egyptian workman had no special cause of complaint. If he was literally "dragged in a pool" by an angry employer when he had been idle,²³⁷ he may to some extent claim our pity, though an idle man is perhaps the better for a little punishment; but if the poet merely meant that he *looked* like a dragged lily after a few hours' hard work in so hot a climate, we need not shed many tears over his hard lot. If the work-room was insufficiently lighted, and he had to bribe the porter to keep the door open, we may admit that he had a grievance, but one not altogether intolerable.