

The Spanish Stitch

BY GERTRUDE WHITMAN HOWELLS

SO MUCH INTEREST has been shown in the Spanish stitch, and so many inquiries have come to me regarding the technique and the best yarns to use, that THE WEAVER seems the most far-reaching way to explain as much as I can about it.

It was about ten years ago, when in Seville, Spain, that I came across a linen strip which had most unusual weaving in the border; I bought it for a song but did not realize how rare it was. I have never seen nor heard of another like it, except for very old coverlets, mostly in tatters, in the collection of Mrs. Byne, in Madrid, Spain.

I had hoped to find some weaver who could show me how to weave it, but Mrs. Byne told me that it had not been woven for many, many years and that no one knew how to do it. The stitch had been brought to Spain, probably, by the Arabs after they had conquered the country, and it had been woven in the Province of Toledo, near Lagartera. It seems to have been used especially for valances on bedspreads, as a decoration, where, regardless of scale, one finds long processions of animals and figures, all of the same size, and quite conventional; the stitch being used as a background for the solid figures. Sometimes very elaborate designs—Abraham and Isaac, the Agnus Dei, St. James riding a camel—were made in this way and used for altar linen; but the district where the stitch was woven seems to have been very limited, and it fell into disuse.

I was looking for something absorbingly interesting to do and to redeem this stitch seemed promising, so I set myself to learning to weave and then to experiment. I knew nothing about yarns and knew no weavers. Every piece was a trial

piece. I was soon convinced that anything well woven and balanced need not be a failure. Now I have the great joy of having won out and having given the stitch to the weavers to use as their individuality may determine; and the field seems wide.

The stitch is made on a tabby shed, and is in three movements:

1st movement—Pick up the last threads of the previous stitch, plus as many more threads as are required for the new stitch. Beat, change shed, beat.

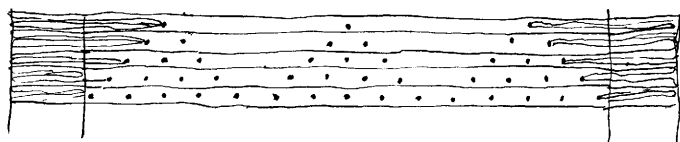
2nd movement—Back to the previous stitch. Beat, change shed, beat.

3rd movement—Forward, adding the threads for the new stitch. Beat, change shed, beat.

The work may be begun from either the right side or from the left, and the return may be either a shot across, or the stitch in reverse.

If the thread is thrown across, all the slanting threads will run in the same way and the effect will be less open; but if the stitch is used in returning, the slanting threads are above one another and in the opposite direction, and the effect is more lacy.

A stitch is completed when the return is made to the original side; hence, when the double stitch is used, it is





higher than when the thread is shot across. This is useful to remember when one wishes to run a design around all four sides of a piece, for, in that case, the stitch should be as square as possible, which depends upon the relation of the warp threads to the weft.

A one-inch selvage followed by a row of pyramids will be a simple way to explain the technique of the stitch.

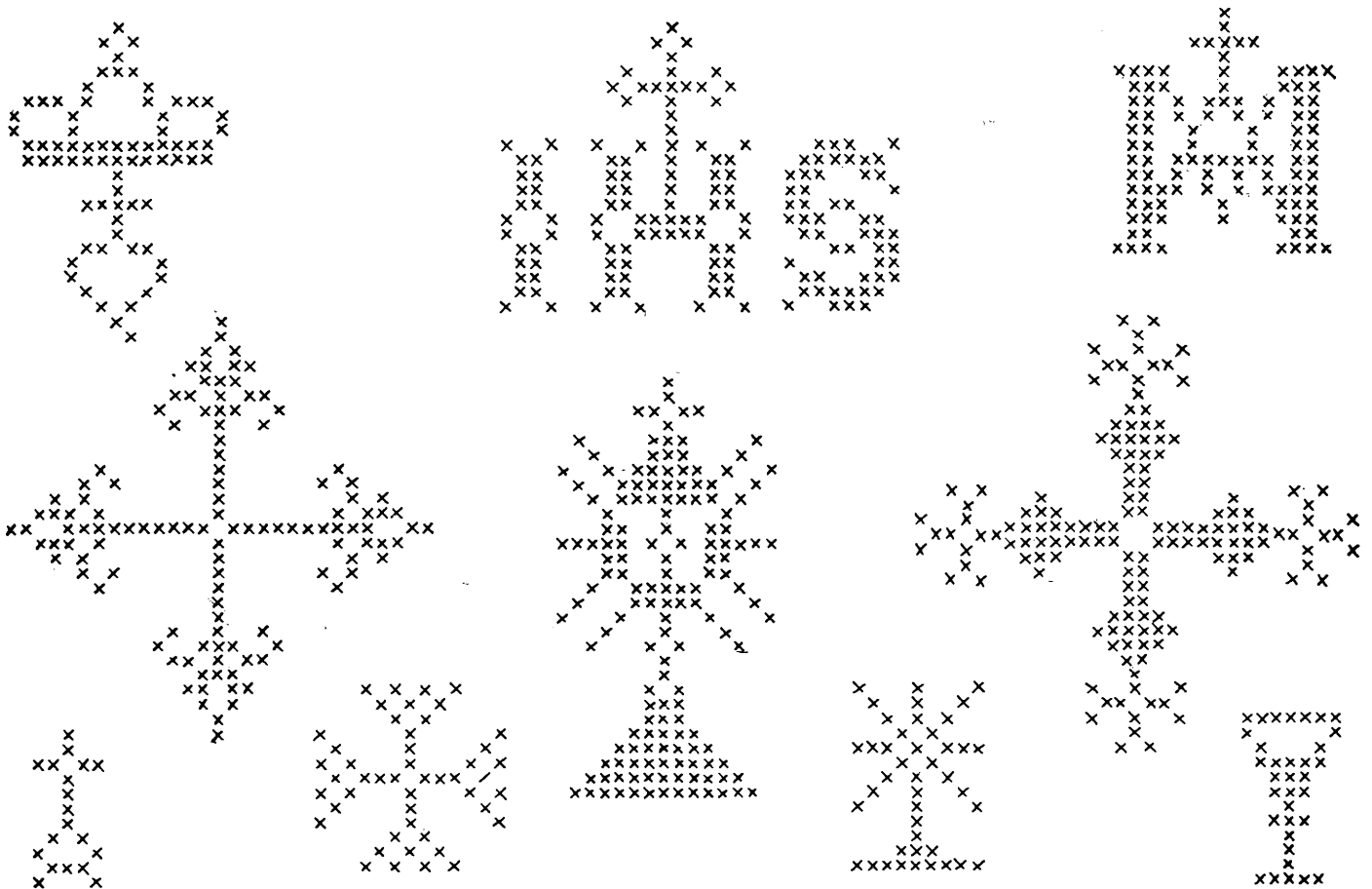
Pick up one inch of threads, on the upper warp on the right-hand side, pull the shuttle through, beat, change shed, beat. Go back to the selvage, beat, change, beat. Pick up the original threads and six more, b., c., b. Go back six threads, b., c., b. Pick up the last six threads and six more, b., c., b.

Continue in this way up to one inch of the left edge, when, instead of picking up six threads, include all the threads to the edge for the selvage, b., c., b. Pick up the selvage threads, b., c., b. Go back to the edge. This completes the first line across.

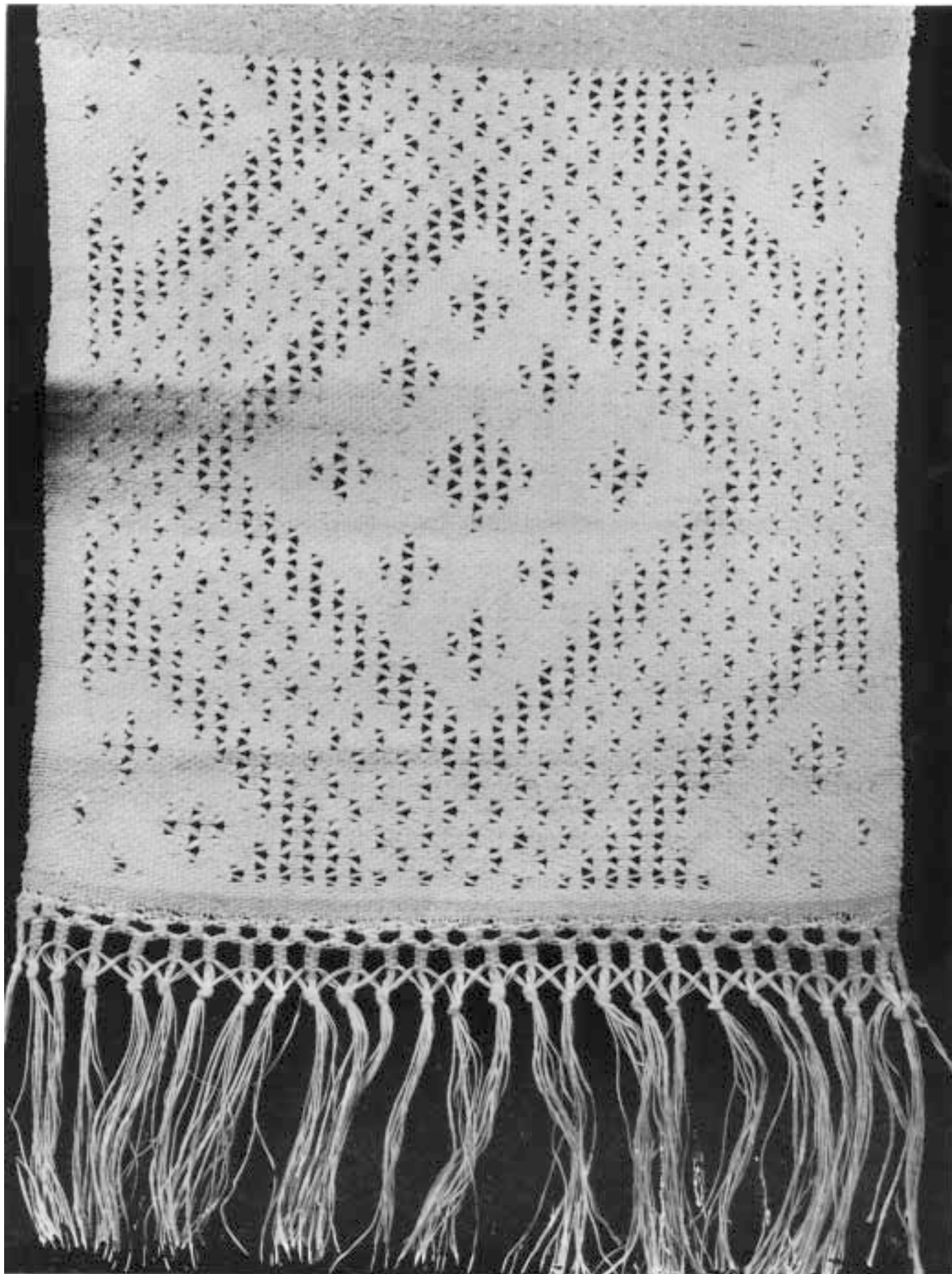
Throw the shuttle across to the right side, b., c., b.

For the second row of holes, pick up the selvage plus three threads, b., c., b. Go back to the edge, b., c., b. Pick up all of these threads and six more, b., c., b. Go back six threads, b., c., b. Go forward these six threads plus six more, b., c., b. Go back six threads, b., c., b; and so on for four holes. Then pick up twelve threads to begin on the next pyramid.

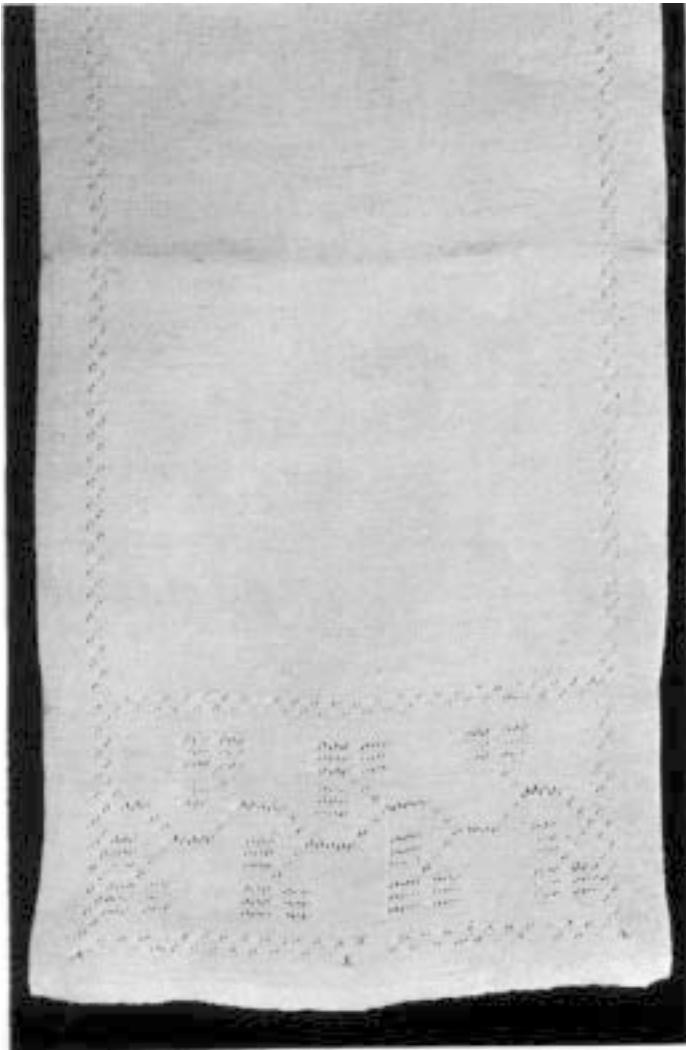
For the third row of holes, pick up six extra threads beyond the selvage; for the fourth row, pick up nine extra threads; for the fifth row, pick up twelve extra threads for the one stitch at the top of the pyramid.



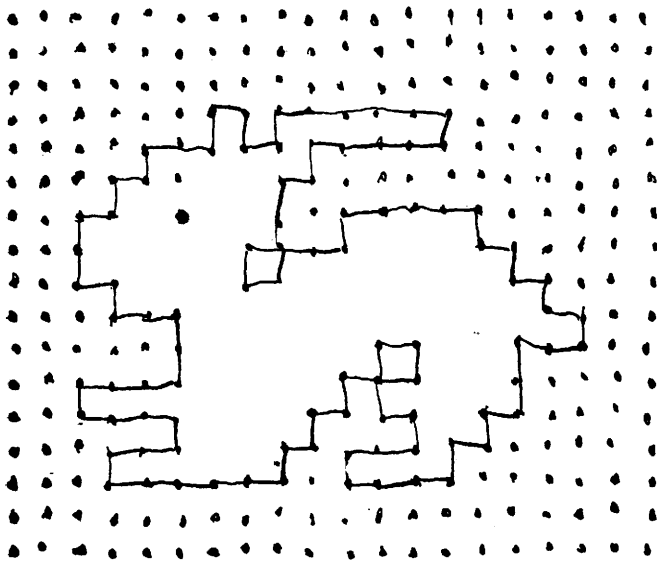
A page from "The Spanish Stitch, and 17th Century Cross Stitch"



Redeemed pattern of original and ancient piece



Easy mistakes are: to pick up the wrong number of threads and then mistake the shed when correcting; to be misled in the second movement by openings in the row below, and



With stitch used as background

not go back to the previous stitch; not to complete the last stitch in the selvage.

Confusion may also come in reading the second half of a pattern when the counting is reversed.

The *hole* corresponds to the cross stitch.

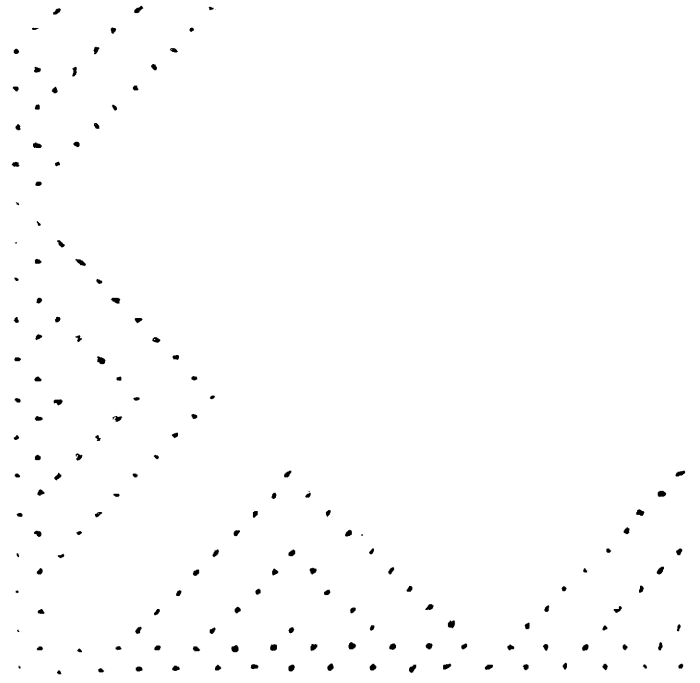
My advice is, at first, never to leave a mistake, but to examine the work closely in order to avoid leaving a mistake too far behind.

I use a 15 or 20 reed, with one or two threads to a dent, depending upon what I wish to weave; 40/2 or 40/3 yarns are useful as warp, and linen floss or heavy linen are effective as weft. Warp should be a well-twisted linen yarn as it must stand constant beating, while the weft gives a prettier result if it is soft and untwisted. But every weaver will make his own experiments as to warp and weft.

A great help to me has been a foundation warp. It is of colored, twisted, mercerized knitting cotton of two colors; one color on the middle of the warping beam with two threads of a different color to mark the exact middle, and the other color on each side. This gives the warp in quarters, which makes reckoning very simple. I tie my lease-sticks loosely so that the cross is never lost.

This warp is quite short, and I thread it to the pattern I wish and draw it through the reed, with about six inches to spare. To these ends I tie my true warp, pulling each thread through its dent when it is tied. If the warp is too wide for the piece to be woven, it can be wound around the warping beam until needed; the cross will be lost, in this case, but can easily be replaced.

When this Spanish stitch is once mastered, it will be found to be easy and fast, with many original possibilities.



A simple and effective corner