CANDACE
WHEELER

# HOW TO MAKE RUGS

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## FOREWORD.
## HOME INDUSTRIES AND DOMESTIC MANUFACTURES

The subject of Home Industries is beginning to attract the attention of those who are interested in political economy and the general welfare of the country, and thoughtful people are asking themselves why, in all the length and breadth of America, there are no well-established and prosperous domestic manufactures.

We have no articles of use or luxury made in *homes* which are objects of commercial interchange or sources of family profit. To this general statement there are but few exceptions, and curiously enough these are, for the most part, in the work of our native Indians.

A stranger in America, wishing—after the manner of travelers—to carry back something characteristic of the country, generally buys what we call "Indian curiosities"—moccasins, baskets, feather-work, and the one admirable and well-established product of Indian manufacture, the Navajo blanket. But these hardly represent the mass of our people.

We may add to the list of Indian industries, lace making, which is being successfully taught at some of the reservations, but as it is not as yet even a self-supporting industry, the above-named “curiosities” and the Navajo blanket stand alone as characteristic hand-work produced by native races; while from our own, or that of the co-existent Afro-American, we have nothing to show in the way of true domestic manufactures.

When we contrast this want of production with the immense home product of Europe, Asia, parts of Africa, and South America—and even certain islands of the Southern Seas—we cannot help feeling a sort of dismay at the contrast; and it is only by a careful study of the conditions which have made the difference that we become reassured. It is, in fact, our very prosperity, the exceptionally favourable circumstances which are a part of farming life in this country, which has hitherto diverted efforts into other channels.

These conditions did not exist during the early days of America, and we know that while there was little commercial exchange of home commodities, many of the arts which are used to such profitable purpose abroad existed in this country and served greatly to modify home expenses and increase home comforts. To account for the cessation of these household industries, it is only necessary to notice the drift of certain periods in the short history of America’s settlement and development.

We shall see that the decline of domestic manufactures in

New England and the Middle States was coincident with two rapidly increasing movements, one of which was the opening and settlement of the great West, and the other the establishment of cotton and woolen mills throughout the country.

In short, the abundant acreage of Western lands, fertile beyond the dreams of New England or Old World tillers, threw the entire business of production or family support upon the man. The profit of his easily acquired farm land was so great and certain that it became almost a reproach to him to have his womenkind busy themselves with other than necessary household duties.

The cotton and woolen mills stood ready to supply the needed material for clothing, and it was positive economy to push the spinning-wheel out of sight under the garret eaves and chop up the bulky loom for firewood. The wife and daughters might reputably cook and clean for the men whose business it was to cover the black acres with golden wheat, but spinning and weaving were decidedly unfashionable occupations. Even the emigrants from countries where the spinning and weaving habit was an inheritance as well as a necessity, were governed by the custom of the country, and devoted the entire energy of the family to the raising of crops.

It is, in fact, owing to fortunate circumstances that, if we except the mountain regions of the South, there are no longer farmhouse or domestic manufactures in America.

This, as I have said, only goes to prove the hitherto unexampled prosperity of the country. In fact, the absence of these very industries means that there are greater sources of profit within the reach of farming households.

This being so, it is natural to ask, why the re-establishment of farmhouse manufactures, or the encouragement and development of them, is a desirable movement.

There are exceedingly good individual and personal reasons; and there are also commercial and national ones, which should not be ignored.

All farmers are not successful. There are many poor as well as rich ones; and the wife of a poor farmer has less pecuniary independence, less money to spend, and fewer ways of gaining it, than any other woman of equal education and character in America.

A poor farmer is often obliged to pay out for labour, fencing, stock, insurance and taxes every dollar gained by the sale of his crops, and if by good luck or good management there should be a small excess, he is apt to hoard it against unlooked-for emergencies. This, at first enforced economy, grows to be the habit of his life, so that even if he becomes well-to-do, or even rich, he distrusts exceedingly the wisdom of any expenditure save his own.

A mechanic, or a man in any small line of business, must trust his wife with the disbursement of a certain part of the family income. It passes through her hands in the way of housekeeping, and the management of it exercises and develops her faculties; but the wife of the farmer has no such interest. The farm is expected to supply the family living, and this blessed fact becomes almost a curse when it deprives the wife of the mental stimulus incident to the management of resources.

Added to this there is often, at least through the winter, partial or complete isolation from neighbourly or public interests. The great crops of the country are produced under circumstances which necessitate distance from even the most limited social centres, and that the farmer's wife suffers from this we know, not only from observation, but from the statistics of insane asylums. And here I am tempted to quote from a letter of a close student of farmhouse life in the West. She writes:

"That the farmer himself, as isolated and hard worked, makes no such record, I believe due to the mental tonic, the broadening influence that comes from a sense of responsibility in life's larger affairs. The woman works like a machine, irresponsible as to final results; the man like a thinking, planning, responsible, independent human being."

This seems to me a very fair statement of the case. The woman, who misses social companionship, and who has not the saving influence of administration and responsibility even in her own household, is narrowed to a very small point in life's affairs, and it is inevitable that she should suffer from it. The variety of her work also has dwindled. Cooking and house-cleaning follow each other in monotonous routine, with too much of it at planting and harvest seasons and too little at others. She has not even the pleasure of comparison and emulation in her daily work; it neither exercises her faculties nor stimulates her thought.

During the winter months she has abundant leisure for a harvest of her own, in some interesting manufacture adapted to her education and circumstances, and in the prosecution of these she would be brought into a bond of common interest with other women. So far I have spoken only of the individual and personal reasons for which certain domestic and artistic industries well might be encouraged; but the public and economic reasons are easy to find.

In looking at the variety and bulk of our national imports, we may be surprised to see how large a proportion of them are of domestic origin. In fact, nearly everything which comes under the head of artistic products is the result of domestic industry. The beauty and simplicity of many of these things is surprising, and yet they have required neither unusual talent or careful training. They are simply the result of the *habit* of production, and their value is in the personal expression we find in them. They have always this advantage over mechanical manufacture, and can be safely relied upon to find a market in the face of close mechanical imitation.

Among these domestic products we shall find the laces of all countries, Ireland, Belgium, France, Italy, Sweden and Russia contributing this beautiful manufacture, from finest to coarsest quality. It is as common a process as knitting in the homes of many countries, and the fact of it being successfully taught in the Indian cabins of the far West proves that it is not a difficult accomplishment. Embroideries, in all countries but our own, are common and profitable home productions; and when we come to hand-weavings the variety is infinite. In practical England, the value of hand-weavings in linens has led to the introduction of small “parlour looms” from Sweden; and damasks of special designs are woven for special customers who appreciate their charm and worth.

Of all hand processes, weaving is the most generally or widely applicable, and the range of beautiful production possible to the simplest weaving is almost beyond calculation.

Many of the costly Eastern rugs are as simply woven as a Navajo blanket, or even a rag carpet. The process is in many cases almost identical, the variation being only in closeness or fineness of warp and arrangement of colour.

I have been much interested of late in an application of art to a local industry in New Hampshire. It is one which seems to prevail to a greater or less degree all through New England, and the product is called “pulled rugs.” The process consists of drawing finely cut rags through some loose, strong cloth, mainly bagging or burlap. I have seen these rugs at Bar Harbor and along the Massachusetts coast for many years, and while they possessed the merit of durability, they were, for the most part, so ugly and unattractive that only the most sympathetic personal interest in the maker would induce one to purchase them. The change that has been wrought in this manufacture by an intelligent application of art is really marvelous. The product came under the attention of a woman trained in that valuable school, “The Institute of Artist Artisans.” She tried the experiment of using new material carefully dyed to follow certain Oriental designs, and the result is a smooth, velvety, thick-piled rug, which cannot be distinguished from a fine Oriental rug of the same pattern. The cost of this manufacture is necessarily considerable, since the process is slow and the material costly. But in spite of these disadvantages, the drawn rugs have met with deserved favour, and are a source of profitable labour to the community. It is undoubtedly the beginning of an important industry, which owes its success entirely to the art education of one woman.

There is an improvement somewhat akin to this in the weaving of rag-carpet rugs, and this is not confined to one locality. It consists in the use of *new* rags, carefully selected as to colour both of rags and warp, and the result is surprisingly good.

One might say that we have in this country peculiar advantages for positive artistic excellence as well as volume of production. We grow our own wool and cotton. We have a great and growing population, with such application of mechanical invention to routine and necessary work as greatly to reduce household labour. Added to this, there has been during the last ten years so much and such general art study as to have created a sort of diffused love of art manufactures, so that many of the people who would naturally adopt the work would have an instructive judgment regarding it. I should not be afraid to predict great and even peculiar excellence in any domestic manufacture which became the habit of any given locality.

*The subject of our domestic industries is one which should fall naturally within the objects of women's clubs.* If every woman's club in the country chose from its members those who by artistic instinct or education, and the possession of practical ability, were fitted to lead in the work, and made of them a committee on home industries, the reports from it would soon become a matter of absorbing interest to the club, and the productions made under the protection, so to speak, of the club, would have an advantage that any commercial business would consider invaluable. Neither would the advantage be limited by the interest of a single club. That great social engine, "The Federation of Women's Clubs," can wield an almost magical power in the creation of interests or encouragement of effort, and the federation of organizations, each one exchanging experiences as well as products, would be an ideal means of growth and extension.

The machinery for the work exists in almost every county of every State of the Union, and with the threefold interest of the promotion of practical art, that of increased manufacture, and the extension of that sisterhood which is one of the most Christian-like and desirable aims of women's clubs, it would seem a natural and congenial effort.

The best results of this general awakening will probably be in the South. Certainly no conditions could be more favourable than those existing in the Cumberland Mountains, where wool and cotton grown upon the rough farms are habitually spun and woven and dyed in the home cabin. The dyes are often made from walnut bark, pokeberry, and certain nuts and roots which have been found capable of “fast” stain and are easily procured. Unfortunately, the facility with which aniline dyes can be used is not unknown. The “linsey woolsey,” which is not only a common manufacture in the farmhouses, but the common wear of both men and women, is an interesting and good manufacture, capable of much wider use than it enjoys at present.

And linsey woolsey is not the only home weaving done in the Cumberland Mountains. The showing of cotton homespun towel weaving at the Atlanta Exposition was a feature of the Exposition, and the homespun blankets of the various kinds which one finds in common use are only a step removed from the process of the admirable Navajo blanket.

We see from these different possibilities and indications, that although we are still a people without true home productions, there is every reason to believe that this condition will not be a lasting one, and that before many years we shall find the special advantages and general cultivation of the country have not only produced but given character to a large domestic manufacture.

# CHAPTER I.
# RUG WEAVING

Rag carpets have been made and used in farmhouses for many generations, but it is only of late that there has been a general demand in all country houses for home-made piazza rugs, bedroom rugs, and rugs for general use.

It has been found that the best and most durable rugs for these purposes, and for bath-rooms for town and city houses, can be made of cotton or woolen rags sewed and woven in the regular old-fashioned rag-carpet way, the difference being—and it is rather a large difference—that the rags must be new instead of old, and that the colors must be good and carefully chosen instead of being used indiscriminately, and in addition to this it must be woven in two-yard lengths, with a border and fringe at either end. This being done, good, attractive and salable rugs can be made of almost any color, and suitable for many purposes. It is an industry perfectly adapted to farmhouse conditions, and if well followed out would make a regular income for the women of the family.

The cumbrous old wooden loom is still doing a certain amount of work in nearly every country neighbourhood, and it is capable of a greatly enlarged and much more profitable practice. I find very little if any difference in the rugs woven upon these and the modern steel loom. It is true that the work is lighter and weaving goes faster upon the latter, and where a person or family makes an occupation of weaving it is probably better to have the latest improvements; but it is possible to begin and to make a success of rag rug weaving upon an old-fashioned loom, and as a rule old-fashioned weavers have little to learn in new methods.

This small book is intended as a help in adapting their work to modern demands, as well as to open a new field to the farmer's family during the winter months, when their time is not necessarily occupied with growing and securing crops.

WEAVING

It does not undertake to teach any one who buys or has inherited a loom to begin weaving without any further preparation. The warping or threading of it must be *seen* to be understood, but when that is once learned, all of the rest is a matter of practice and experiment, and is really no more difficult than any other domestic art. One would not expect to spin without being shown how to pull the wool and turn the wheel at the same time, or even to sew or knit without some sort of instruction, and the same is true of weaving.

There are many old looms still to be found in the garrets of farmhouses, and where one has been inherited it is best to begin learning to weave upon it instead of substituting a new one, since the same knowledge answers for both. Probably some older member of the family, or at least some old neighbour, will be able to teach the new beginner how to set up the loom and to proceed from that to actual weaving. After this is learned it rests with one's self to become a good weaver, a practical dyer, and to put colors together which are both harmonious and effective.

What I have chiefly tried to show is how to get proper materials and how to use them to the best advantage. I think it is safe to say that no domestic art is capable of such important results from a pecuniary point of view, or so important an extension in the direction of practical art. Where it is used as an art-process and an interesting occupation, by women of leisure, it is capable of the finest results, and there is no reason why these results should not become a matter of business profit.

Rag carpets have generally been woven of rags cut from any old garments cast aside by the household—coats and trousers too old for patching, sheets and pillow-cases too tender to use, calico, serge, bits of woolen stuffs old and new, went into the carpet basket, to be cut or torn into strips, sewed indiscriminately together, and rolled into balls until there should be enough of them for the work of the loom. When this time came the loom would be warped with white cotton or purple yarn, dyed with “sugar paper” or logwood, and the carpet woven. Even with this entire carelessness as to any other result than that of a useful floor covering, the rag carpet, with its “hit or miss” mixture, was not a bad thing; and a very small degree of attention has served to give it a respectable place in domestic manufactures. But it is capable of being carried much farther; in fact, I know of no process which can so easily be made to produce really good and beautiful results as rag carpet weaving.

The first material needed is what are called carpet warps, and these can be purchased in different weights and sizes and more or less reliable colours in every country store, this fact alone showing the prevalence of home weaving, since the yarns are not—at least to my knowledge—used for any other purpose.

The cost of warp, dyed or undyed, depends upon the quantity required, or, in other words, upon its being purchased at wholesale or retail. At retail it costs twenty cents per pound, and at wholesale sixteen. To buy of a wholesale dealer one must be able to order at least a hundred pounds, and as this would weave but a hundred and fifty rugs it would not be too large a quantity to have on hand for even a moderate amount of weaving. These prices refer only to ordinary cotton warps, and not to fine “silk finish," to linen, or even to silk ones, each of which has its special use and price.

In all of them fast colour is a most desirable quality, and, indeed, for truly good work a necessity. I have found but two of the colours which are upon ordinary sale to be reasonably fast, and those are a very deep red and the ordinary orange. The latter will run when dipped in water; in fact, it will give out dye to such good purpose that I have sometimes used the water in which it has been steeped to dye cotton rags, as it gives a very good and quite fast lemon yellow.

It follows, then, that in weaving rugs (which must be washable) with orange warp, the warp must be steeped in warm water before using. It can be used in that state, or it can be *set* with alum, or it can be dipped in a thin indigo dye and made into a good and fast green.

The only recourse of the domestic weaver who wishes to establish her rugs as of the very best make is to dye her own warps; and this is not only an easy but a most interesting process; so much so, in fact, that I am tempted to enlarge upon it as a practical study for the young people of the family. It is necessary at the very beginning to put much stress upon the value of fast colour in the warping yarn, since a faded warp will entirely neutralize the colour of the rags, and spoil the beauty of the most successful rug.

The most necessary and widely applicable colour needed in warps, or, indeed, in rags, is a perfectly fast blue in different depths, and this can only be secured by indigo. Aniline blue in cotton is never sun-fast and rarely will stand washing, but a good indigo blue will neither run or fade, and is therefore precisely what is needed for domestic manufacture. Fortunately, the dye-tub has been, in the past at least, a close companion of the loom, and most old-fashioned farmers' wives know how to use it. With this one can command reliable blue warps of all shades; and when we come to directions for making washable rugs its importance will be seen.

As I have said, by dipping orange warp in medium indigo blue a fast and vivid green can be secured, and these two tints, together with orange and red, give as many colours as one needs for rug weaving; they give, in fact, a choice of five colours—orange, red, blue, green and white. Orange and red are both colours which can be relied upon when prepared from the ordinary "Magic" dyes of commerce. Turkey red especially is safe to last, even when applied to cotton. In the general disapproval of mineral dyes, this one may certainly be excepted, as well as the crimson red known as "cardinal," which is both durable and beautiful, in silk or woolen fibre or texture.

After good warps are secured, the second material needed is *filling*; and here the subject of old and new rags is to be considered. Of course, cloth which has served other purposes, as in sheets, pillow-cases, curtains, dress skirts, etc., is still capable of prolonged wear when the thin parts are removed and those which are fairly strong are folded and bunched into carpet filling;

and for family use, or limited sale, such rags—dyed in some colour—are really desirable. Good varieties of washable rugs can be made of half-worn cotton without dyeing (although they will not be as durable as if made from unworn muslin) by using blue warps to white fillings. The colour effects and methods of weaving will be the same whether old or new rags are used; but in making a study of rag rug weaving from the point of view of building up an important industry, it is necessary to consider only the use of new rags and how to procure the best of them at the cheapest rates.

There is a certain amount of what is called waste in all cloth mills, either cotton, wool or silk, and also in the manufacture of every kind of clothing. The waste from cotton mills, consisting for the most part of "piece ends," imperfect beginnings or endings, which must be torn off when the piece is made up, are exactly suitable for carpet weaving; and, in fact, if made for the purpose could hardly be better. These can be bought for from ten to twelve cents per pound. The same price holds for ginghams and for coloured cottons of various sorts.

Cutting from shirt-making and clothing establishments are not as good. In shirt cuttings the cloth varies a good deal in thickness, and, in addition to this disadvantage, cannot be torn into strips, many of the pieces being bias, and therefore having to be cut. It is true that while this entails additional use of time in preparation, bias rags are a more elastic filling than straight ones, and if uniformly and carefully cut and sewed a rug made from them is worth more and will probably sell for more than one made of straight rags.

Shirt cuttings sell for about three cents per pound, and while a proportion of them are too small for use and would have to be re-sold for paper rags, the cost of material for cotton rugs would still be very trifling. Suitable woolen rags from the mills sell for twenty-five cents per pound. Tailors' and dressmakers' cuttings are much cheaper, and very advantageous arrangements can be made with large establishments if one is prepared to take all they have to offer.

One difficulty with woolen rags from tailoring establishments is in the sombreness of the colours; but much can be done by judicious sorting and sewing of the rags, for it is astonishing how bits of every conceivable colour will melt together when brought into a mixed mass; also if they are woven upon a red warp the effect is brightened.

Having secured materials of different kinds, the next step is in the cutting and sewing, and here also new methods must step in.

The old-fashioned way of sewing carpet rags—that is, simply *tacking* them together with a large needle and coarse thread—will not answer at all in this new development of rug making. The filling must be smooth, without lumps or rag ends, and the joinings absolutely fast and fairly inconspicuous. Some of the new rags from cotton or woolen mills come in pieces from a quarter to a half-yard in length and the usual width of the cloth. These can be sewed together on the sewing machine, lapping and basting them before sewing. They should lap from a quarter to a half inch and have two sewings, one at either edge of the lap. If sewed in this way they can afterward be torn into strips, using the scissors to cut across seams. It can be performed very speedily when one is accustomed to it, and is absolutely secure, so that no rag ends can ever be seen in the finished weaving.

If the cloth pieces which are to be used for rags are not wide enough to sew on the sewing machine, they should be lapped and sewed by hand in the same way, unless they happen to have selvedge ends, in which case they should by all means be strongly overhanded. This makes the best possible joining, as it is no thicker than the rest of the rag filling, and consequently gives an even surface. Good sewing is the first step toward making good and workmanlike rugs.

Whenever the rags can be torn instead of cut, it is preferable, as it secures uniform width. The width, of course, must vary according to the quality of cloth and weight desired in the rug. A certain weight is necessary to make it lie smoothly, as a light rug will not stay in place on the floor. In ordinary cotton cloth an inch wide strip is not too heavy and will pinch into the required space. If, however, a door-hanging or lounge-cover is being woven, the rags may be made half that width.

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