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The Story of a Highland Industry.

(By the Duchess of Sutherland, in 'Youth's Companion.')

My day it wears onward 'twixt spinning and weaving;
The noise of men's laughter, the cry of their grieving
Drift slow by my thorn-tree like drifting of snow.
And on the old branches the new blossoms blow.

It has been stated that Scotchmen combine a tendency to foreign settlement with the most passionate love of their native land.

If this be true, there are many, I venture to believe, in the great continent of America ready to extend sympathy and understanding to their toiling kinsfolk in the Highlands and islands of Northern Britain. Wide is the Atlantic, but its waves dash with equal force and majesty upon the coast of Labrador and the cliffs of the Butt of Lewis.

The American, whose forbears spun and sowed in the old country, can teach us many lessons. He ever reminds us, in the full vigor of his new life, of the treasures of a past which we possess and only half appreciate. Finding us forgetful of all but the pressure of up-to-date conditions, he sails across the main to use wealth and influence in rescuing from decay old buildings, old institutions, even old superstitions. He shows in practical ways honor wherever genius has reared its head,—as witness the new Ruskin Hall at Oxford,—and he struggles, although sometimes it is a thankless task, to keep our eyes open to the purer forms of art, of culture, of social economics, which have been evolved at last in our old world from the slow but glorious growth of the ages.

Remarkable as it is for its wonderful scientific discoveries, few can deny that the nineteenth century has made for ugliness. The hideous factories, the machinery, the squalid dwellings of great cities vividly support the assertion.

Only during the last decade a revulsion of feeling has arisen. The Sleeping Beauty has slept her sleep, the Fairy Prince, in the form of enlightened public opinion, has struggled over every obstacle nearer to her arms, and the last of the great prophets of the century, John Ruskin, did not die without opportunity to know that his labors and those of his co-workers—Carlyle, Morris, Rossetti and the rest—have not been altogether in vain, that their splendid condemnations and appreciations will bear fruit in a dawning era.

Men's eyes see again, men's minds live again, men's hands fashion again.

Already the revival of handicrafts which flourished in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries is taking root throughout Great Britain. At the annual Exhibition of the Home Arts and Industries in the Albert Hall in London are to be found exquisite bookbinding from Chiswick, specimens of the Della Robbia pottery from Birkenhead, fine, handwoven linen from the Ruskin Industry at Keswick, and so many other presentments indicative of this growing artistic feeling that it would be impossible to enumerate them here.

THE MOTIVE OF THE REVIVAL.

In these efforts there is no headstrong ambition, for, to use the wise sentences of Mr. J. A. Hobson, the economist: 'It is, in a word, a practical informal attempt of a civilized society to mark out for itself the reasonable limits of machine production, and to insist that "cheapness" shall not dominate the whole industrial world to the detriment of the pleasure and benefit arising from good work to the worker and consumer. Such a movement neither hopes nor seeks to restore mediaevalism in industry, nor does it profess hostility to machinery; but it insists that machines shall be confined to the heavy, dull, monotonous, and, therefore, inhuman processes of work, while for the skill of human hand and eye shall be preserved all work which is pleasant and educative in its doing, and the skill and character of which contribute pleasure and profit to its use.'

Yet, in connection with all this, by sheer force of circumstances, the home industries of Harris and Lewis, of Shetland, of Sutherland and other parts of the Highlands stand somewhat aloof; in a sense, through their tremendous importance, they represent not a mere question of art and sentiment, but a serious problem.

The people of the Highlands and islands have little land to cultivate. Their homes, most of them still built after a primitive fashion, with thick stone walls, thatched roof, no chimney, tiny loopholes for windows, cling to the rocky sides of hills. Enter any of these cabins, and through the wreaths of blue curling peat smoke you may see an old woman seated spinning by the fire, and beyond, in the corner, the family loom, where the women of the house spend so many laborious hours in their struggle for daily bread, while the men 'follow the sea,' a precarious way of life.

The work done by these crofters and cotters is beautiful and useful. That is unquestionable. The industry has existed since time immemorial, from Ossianic days, when one

came slowly from the setting sun
To Emer of Borda, in her clay-piled dun,
And found her dyeing cloth with subtile care.

But more than this, the success or failure of the industry at the present time means life or death to a people; that overmastering power,—machinery, has taken it by the throat and written extinction in grim letters on its brow.

The Scottish Home Industries Association has been formed to combat this power; to ensure, with all the force of practical knowledge and sympathy, a legitimate trade for these people; to fight their battles against the ills of competition and 'truck'—in fact, to keep open, for this generation at least, a wide channel for the distribution of the beautiful homespun cloth.

HIGHLAND SPINNERS GETTING READY FOR WORK.

In a short article like this it is impossible to sum up every detail of the manufacture, or to find scope for a description of the legends connected with the pathetic surroundings of the workers. I would, however, transcribe, as shortly as possible, for those who have not learned Highland folk-lore and Highland customs at their grandame's knee, the processes of hand-spinning and hand-weaving.

After the wool packets are opened out and roughly sorted or stapled according to quality and length of fiber, of which there is considerable variety in the same fleece, the wool is cleansed from the grease derived from contact with the sheep (and the various protective 'dipping' or 'bathing' processes to which that animal is in autumn subjected). This is done by steeping in a hot liquid.

Dried and shaken up and still further 'sorted,' the wood is then passed through the process of carding or combing, which lays its fibers in the same direction. This is effected by means of a pair of implements like hair-brushes, with the handles at the sides and set with metal teeth.

The wool is now nearly ready to be spun into thread. The distaff and spindle were, from very early times, used for this purpose. The former is a staff about four feet long, fixed in the spinner's waist belt on the left side, or more commonly in her upturned outer skirt, which thus forms a pocket in front for carrying the clews or balls of thread. To the projecting head of the distaff the wool, previously cross-carded into inch-thick loose cylinders,—in which the fiber has now assumed a sort of spiral arrangement,—is tied in an open bunch or bundle. From this it is fed out by the left hand of the spinner to the spindle, which is held at starting in the right hand, and afterward swings from it. The spindle is a rounded piece of wood, about a foot long and half an inch in diameter, load-