

Hand-woven spot muslin

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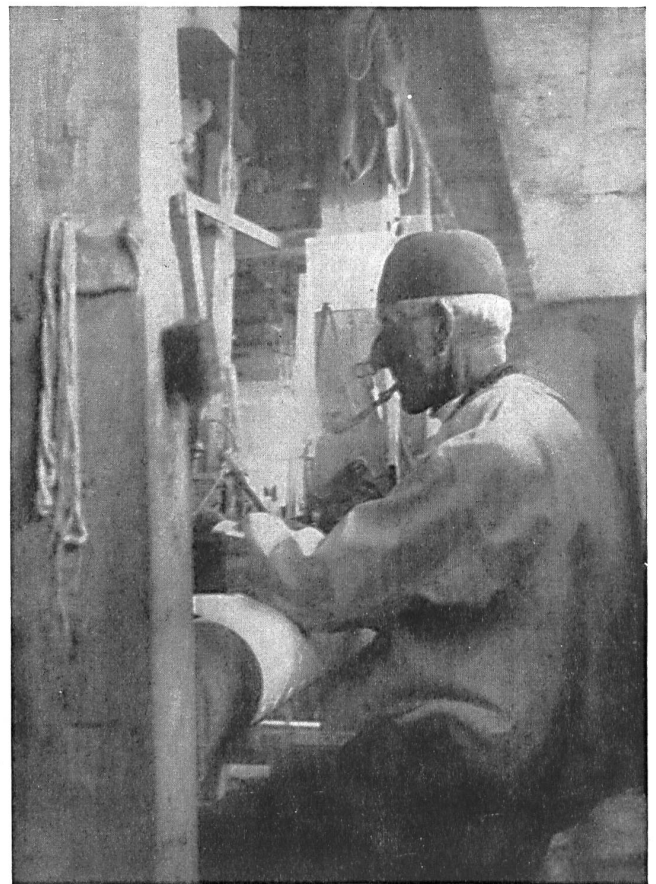
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Hand-woven Spot muslin

It was about the year 1823 that a certain Mr. J.-U. Altherr, a skilful worker of Teufen in the district of Appenzell, succeeded after many attempts in designing a « Spot muslin » loom (Dotted Swiss), that is to say a loom making it possible to achieve embroidered effects during weaving. Although at the beginning the skill and imagination of the weavers did not extend beyond the classical « polka dots », they were soon able to make more complicated non-detached floral designs. It was only after 1840 that this new Swiss industry began to expand rapidly, and in 1855 it was estimated that there were some ten thousand looms in eastern Switzerland. Their number decreased however as a result of the extraordinary popularity of the embroidering machine, and by 1900 there were less than four thousand of them. This figure was maintained until 1921, when a world slump hit a very hard blow at this industry which provided such congenial work and filled the villages of Appenzell with the joyous clatter of shuttles thrown by hand. But hand weaving did not disappear entirely from the scene, for fashionable women know that polka dots of real dotted Swiss are much stronger than those of imitations. As for the floral designs, as pretty as lace, they have, in spite of their rustic freshness, an old-world touch that adds to their charm. It is not surprising therefore that Haute Couture has rediscovered this « Cinderella » of Switzerland's textile industries and used it to good effect in its creations (see model by Balmain, page 29).

The picturesque old weaver, shown here at his work, runs no risk of unemployment, for there are only four hundred like him, all in the canton of Appenzell, who weave their plumetis by hand and who still persist in measuring it by the ell (1 ell = 45 in.), not wishing to submit in any way to the modernism represented by the metric system. If the industry carried on by these four hundred weavers, whose average age is between 64 and 65, is in danger, it is not through any lack of outlets for their products, but more tragically because they cannot find enough young men to take their place. For them, weaving



Vieux tisserand appenzellois à son métier à main.
Old weaver of Appenzell at his hand-loom.
Anciano tejedor de Appenzell tejiendo en su telar a mano.
Alter Appenzeller Handweber bei der Arbeit.

has always been rather a complement to agriculture than an independent industry (exporters who have urgent orders to meet at harvest time know this only too well!). To-day the farmer is better off, families are no longer so large, the factory and the town are nearer and the weaver's underground workshop is lacking in attraction for young people more interested in a life of bustle and activity than one of quiet contemplation to the sound of the shuttles as they fly to and fro.

Reichenbach & Cie, Saint-Gall
« RECORAYA »

Ramages plumetis sur batiste
tissée main.

Hand woven dotted Swiss flower-
work on batiste.

Plumetes con ramajes sobre
batista tejida a mano.

Plumetis-Ranken auf hand-
gewobenem Batist.



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