

XXIII. HOME-MADE GARMENTS-SPINNING AND WEAVING.

In connection with household duties there were things to do that would not now be considered in keeping with the way we manage our home affairs nowadays.

A great deal of the clothing worn by the heads of families and the children was manufactured by and under the supervision of the wife and mother. Almost every family owned a few sheep, and the wool, after it had been sheared in the spring, was thoroughly washed and dried, and picked and carded, and woven, and the cloth cut and made up into garments for the various members of the family by the good wife and mother. It was a long, tedious, laborious road from the wool on the sheep's back to the completion of the "homespun" garment on the person of the wearer. At that time the "the tariff on wool" had not begun to cut any figure, and it did not matter whether there was a high protective tariff on wool or not, as there was no wool imported into the western country at that time, and nobody had any use for imported wool anyhow. All the wool was used at home, and it was many years after the first settlement before there was a surplus to dispose of.

The fleece of wool was sorted, the fine from the coarse, and carded by means of hand cards made of short bent wire thickly fastened into leather, which was in turn fastened to a small board about 3 by 4 1/2 inches thick, to which were fastened handles. Two of these cards were used. A small amount of wool was placed on one of the cards, and then the carder would hold one in his left hand and pull with the other in his right hand until the wool had been thoroughly torn to pieces, when it was made into a small roll, say, about half or three-quarters of an inch in diameter and five or six inches in length.

Carding was hard work, but after one got used to it, it became easier, and in time many became experts and could "roll" off a considerable quantity in the course of a day.

But spinning was the most difficult operation of all. The old spinning wheel was an absolutely indispensable piece of furniture in every well-regulated cabin. They were of two kinds: the large wheel with the projecting spindle, which was used only to spin wool, and the small wheel with distaff, which was used mostly for spinning flax, but on which wool was sometimes spun. To draw out the roll and turn the wheel just fast enough to move the spindle with the proper velocity to make the thread the proper

Size and keep it so was something that not everyone could do. When the spool was filled the thread was run off on a reel until it had so many "cuts," they were taken off into hanks, and then into dozens and hung up bunches for use when needed. .

The yarn was colored red, brown, black, yellow and blue;, according to fancy of the manufacturers. This was generally used for filling. The loom was generally of domestic manufacture, except the reed and shuttles, which were purchased by cotton from those who made them for the retail trade. The different colored threads were fastened into as many shuttles passed through the warp from one side to the other as often as was necessary to make the stripe desired, when that particular shuttle would be laid aside and a shuttle containing another color would be taken up and passed through, and so on alternately until all had been used. Some very handsome plaids were made in this way and when worked up into "linsy woolsy" dresses and other garments for the female portion of the household, they were not only handsome, but, for winter wear, warm and comfortable. When cloth was to be woven for men's wear the yarn was generally colored blue, and to make it variegated, a string would be tied tightly around the hank before it was dipped into the coloring kettle, and this would prevent the color from taking effect, leaving a white spot in the thread which, when woven into cloth, gave it the appearance of "Kentucky jeans. A suit of this kind of cloth, when neatly worked up, made a dress that was not to be sneezed at.

For summer wear linen made of flax was generally used, and so almost every farmer had a flax patch sufficiently large to supply the supposed demand. After the ground was prepared the seed was sown, and nothing more was necessary until the stalks had ripened and it was ready to pull. It was carefully pulled up by the roots and laid down in swaths to cure, after which it was bound in bundles and put under cover for use when wanted. A flax break was made having a "level" with grooves in it, so that when the flax was placed on the break and the lever was pressed down on it with sufficient force the straw inside would be broken, leaving the fiber undisturbed. When the flax was thoroughly broken, in order to get all the pieces of straw out from among the fiber it had to be carefully "scutched" or "wingled." This was done by setting a board upright and rounding off the top, making it even and smooth. An instrument made of hickory wood, say about three feet long, much in the shape of a butcher knife, with a proper handle, with which to do the scutching, was used. Taking a hand full of broken flax in his left hand, close to the lower end, and throwing it over the top of the board, and taking the "scutcher" in his right hand he beat away, turning it in his hand as often as necessary until the broken straw had all been scutched out, and nothing but the fiber, which had been beaten into tow, left. Before it could be spun into thread. It was necessary to run it through a hackle for the purpose of separating the coarse part from the fine. When it had been properly hackled it was wound tightly on a distaff, which was a necessary attachment to the old spinning wheel. .Starting a thread from the flax on the distaff, setting the wheel in motion and keeping it going by foot power, our ancient and

Amiable mothers would work away from morning until night, day in and day out, spinning thread out of which to make husband and children shirts and other clothing for the summer.

The weaving of cloth out of flax was done on the same loom and in the same way as woolen cloth was woven. The main garment made out of flax cloth was men's and boys' shirts. At first, without underclothing, as may be well imagined, they were a "holy terror" to the skin, and as there were no buttons, and the collars and sleeves had to be fastened with a needle and thread and tied in a hard knot, there was no way of getting them loose so as to relieve one's epidermis by scratching. After they were washed and ironed a few times, however, they became quite smooth and were more or less durable.

The greatest difficulty the writer had in wearing these primitive shirts was in getting the cuffs and collar unfastened and properly fastened up again when he stole away on Sunday against the express commands of his parents and went in swimming. Some of the wicked boys in the neighborhood, however, generally managed to secretly carry off the family needle and thread, after it had been used for the day, and in that case the collar and cuffs, would be fastened, and unless some other evidence of truancy appeared, the beech rod above the fireplace would be permitted to remain in its place; otherwise, otherwise.