

INTENSE EXCITEMENT!

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FIRST CLASS



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# GLAD TIDINGS



Thomas Nast's famous cartoon from  
Harpers Weekly, 1880.

This is from the Black Sheep HandspINNers Guild to YOU,  
its members, with best wishes for the warm and cozy holidays  
this winter. We hope you enjoy this bundle of goodies and  
that it gives you food for thought and spinning in 1982!!!

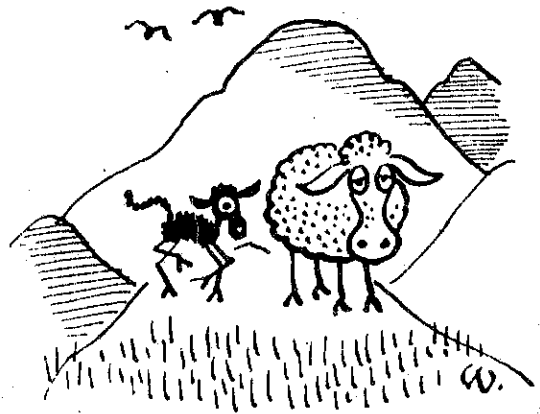
-- Jean Warholic

## THE OLD SPINNING WHEEL

"It used to stand in the kitchen, in a  
corner cheery and bright,  
Where the burning log in the fireplace  
shot up glowing fountains of light,  
And the crackling flames played hide and  
seek with the shadows hid away  
In the yawning mouth of the chimney, so  
awfully huge and gray,  
Or leaped out on the red brick hearth  
and danced with the shadows there,  
While the old wheel kept the best of  
time in the firelight's fitful glare.  
Singing and spinning  
Spinning and spinging,  
Now fast and faster it turns,  
And the flames leaped high  
And the shadows danced by  
When grandmother used to spin.

The wool on the old brown spindle was as  
snowy as the snowdrifts outside,  
And seemed as we watched it whirling  
round like a snowball taking a ride,  
Then winding the yarn in a big round  
ball, so firm and soft and white,  
We were almost afraid it would really  
melt in the heat of the open fire-  
light,  
But tossed it about and watched it grow  
as the wheel kept buzzing round,  
And laughed and romped in the ruddy glow  
and thought it the sweetest sound,  
Spinning and singing  
Singing and spinning  
Now fast and faster it turns,  
And the flames leaped high  
And the shadows danced by  
When grandmother used to spin.

(This sentimental verse was found in an  
old scrapbook belonging to Les Phelps'  
grandmother. No date or author given.)



### Shaggy sheep story?

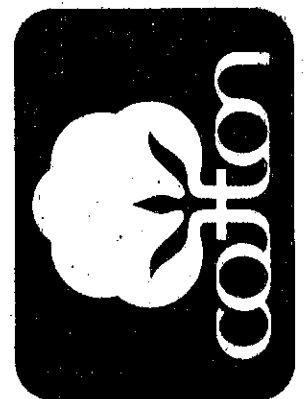
IN THE Lake District last spring, I was astonished by the number of black lambs born to ewes of a very delicate grey. It turns out that this is nothing freakish, but normal for one of the hardest breeds of sheep — the Herdwick. They've survived the bleak Cumbrian fells since the 10th century, when Norse settlers discovered them. Now, like so many old breeds, their future is precarious. The Herdwick exists by courtesy of the National Trust, which owns over 70 fell farms in Cumbria and around 18,000 sheep. The Trust now markets hand-knitting yarn spun from the wool of the Herdwick and the more prolific Swaledale sheep, the latter a slightly less hardy lot, but with a finer fleece. You can buy the wool, together with two sets of knitting patterns specially designed for it, from the Trust's Mail Order Warehouse at Western Way, Melksham, Wiltshire, or direct from selected National Trust shops (those in Cumbria open for the summer season at Easter). The Herdwick fleece has a high proportion of 'kemp', or hair, which accounts for their remarkable resistance to bitter weather. In Cumbria they'll tell you how Herdwick sheep have survived for over two weeks in snow drifts eating their own wool to keep alive. The gradual change from black to grey as the sheep matures means that, uniquely, you can get a tweed from the wool without dying. The patterns, priced at 45p and 55p, I found most impressive. They include instructions for making a coat, mittens and legwarmers.



## GRAZING IN THE GRASS

Sick and tired of having mowed the lawn all summer, aren't you? You should have called Louis Valente, of Oak Hill, N.Y. For \$50 a summer, he'll rent you one of the 125 sheep he and his family raise, and the little lamb will eat your ivy and the rest of the backyard.

Honest. We're not trying to pull the wool over your eyes. More than 70 people have flocked to him since April, mostly those who have several acres or more that need cutting. "You can say we cater to the upper upper class," notes Valente, a former New York City policeman. "It's sort of a status symbol for them."



employment, or by a woman or man in the family, on a loom kept for that purpose in almost every thrifty farmer's house.

The American Museum 1789

Mrs. Turtel, wife of an extensive farmer at Aughagallen, near Lurgan, was one of the most celebrated spinners of that district of Antrim. This lady spun, from flax grown in her neighbourhood, a parcel of yarn so exceedingly fine that three hanks of it could have been passed through a wedding-ring. That yarn was afterwards woven into a cambric web by a superior weaver, and the cloth, in its brown state, was quite a marvel of fineness and beauty.

H. McCall, Ireland and Her Staple Manufacture (Belfast 1855)

First throw aside your top-knots of pride;  
Wear naught but your own country linen;  
Of economy boast, let your pride be the most  
To show clothes of your own make and spinning.

anon. rhyme from the American Revolutionary War period

Good flax and good hemp to have of her own,  
In May a good huswife will see it be sown.  
And afterwards trim it to serve in a need;  
The fible to spin, and the card for her seed.

anon. rhyme both quoted by Ella S. Bowles, Homespun Handicrafts (Philadelphia, 1931)

The spinning of wool is only calculated for the lower sort of people, whereas the other (i.e. linen) comprehends all ranks and degrees. The delicacy of the finest lady cannot be disgusted with the spinning of flax.

Contest proposal from mid 18th century Wales quoted in Hochberg, Spin, Span, Spun.

*BEES IN AMBER by John Henham*

**WEAVERS ALL**

Warp and Wool and Tangle,—  
*Weavers of Webs are we.*  
Living and dying--and mightier dead,  
For the shuttle, once sped, is sped—is sped;—  
*Weavers of Webs are we.*

White, and Black, and Hodden-gray,—  
*Weavers of Webs are we.*  
To every weaver one golden strand  
Is given in trust by the Master-Iland;—  
*Weavers of Webs are we.*

And that we weave, we know not,—  
*Weavers of Webs are we.*  
The threads we see, but the pattern is known  
To the Master-Weaver alone, alone;—  
*Weavers of Webs are we.*

Wool, cotton, silk, and linen were the four major spinning fibers used in the past. However, a wide variety of other natural fibers have gone into making yarn and thread, including: abaca, alpaca, angora, apocynum, asbestos, banana, bear, buffalo, camel, cashmere, cat, coir, cow hair, dog, goat, guanaco, hemp, nehequin, ixtle, jute, llama, mohair, musk ox, pina, raffia, ramie, reindeer, sisal, stinging nettle, vicuna, yak, yucca, a number of pelt furs... and many more.

(How many have YOU spin by now? From Spin, Span, Spun, by Bette Hochberg.)

The following is from Gretchen Sachse and her historians-in-residence project about linen economy in Tompkins County. These references are but a few of the many interesting items she came across during the project (and since!). We are pleased she would share them with us...

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Why should the American farmer devote years of preparation for the supply of such a limited requirement? He wisely scatters his flax-seed thinly, raises a seed crop without effort or special study, and markets the product readily at a profit.

Edmund A Whitman, Flax Culture (Boston 1888) p. 10

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Although the exhibition of household articles was meagre enough, the annexed list will show that there is one woman still among us who teacheth her handmaidens how to spin, and plieth her fingers busily. All the articles named were exhibited by Mrs. B. R. Voorhees of Amsterdam, N. Y., and mostly manufactured by her own hands. She designs all her own patterns, and prepares everything from the raw material... We presume she does not spin so much street yarn as some of her sex; or she could not find time to spin so much woolen and linen.

from a report on the State Fair (NY) in American Agriculturist, 1849

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We are surprised that our farmers do not turn their attention more to the cultivation of flax. This is a crop easily raised, and when properly managed, a very productive one.

Our practice, owing to the coarser fabrics we manufacture from it, is to secure both fibre and seed, which, for our purposes, is undoubtedly the most profitable.

But one of the great advantages to be derived from this crop, is, the employment which getting it out gives to the men and boys, and to the women and children in spinning and weaving in winter, when they have little else to do, and for the want of which, they are too frequently idle, or something worse. As a means for the improvement and preservation of industrious economical habits, it is of great value, independent of its value as a field crop. About 400 pounds of flax and 12 bushels of seed is a fair crop from an acre. The flax is worth 8 to 10 cents per lb. in this market; the seed \$1.40 to \$1.60 per bushel.

American Agriculturist(May 1844)p.129

[note: today retted, unbroken flax straw costs \$2.25 per lb. by the bale (250 lbs.) line flax \$6. - \$10 per lb., and flax seed \$3.60 per lb., plus shipping (40 lb./bushel).]

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Before the late war, there was scarce a family out of sea-port towns, which did not supply itself with woolen and linen cloth from the labour of its own hands, without retarding the improvement of their farms, by taking such hours for this purpose as could not be employed in agriculture. If anyone did not raise sheep, he might purchase from him that did, or barter with him for flax or some other commodity which the other wanted. A few pounds weight of wool or flax will provide staples for more cloth than one family can commonly want, and there being obtained, the labour necessary to prepare it for use is furnished by the man's own family. The mistress, daughter and maid-servant comb the wool and spin it into yarn. The flax being broken, cleaned and dressed by the master, son, or man-servant is by the woman drawn into thread. The yarn and thread thus furnished are speedily woven into cloth, by one who professedly follows that

### FOREFATHER'S SONG

(Attributed to a member of the  
Plymouth Colony, c. 1630.)

"And now our garments begin to grow thin  
And wool is much wanted to card and spin  
If we can get a garment to cover without  
Our other in-garments are clout upon clout.\*  
Our clothes we brought with us are apt to  
be torn,  
They need to be clouted soon after they're  
worn,  
But clouting our garments they hinder us  
nothing --  
Clouts double are warmer than single  
whole clothing."

\*patch

Homespun and Blue, p. 8 (Martha Genung  
Sterns).

### SEVEN THINGS FOR A CRAFTSMAN TO REMEMBER...

The Value of Time;  
The Success of Perseverance;  
The Pleasure of Working;  
The Dignity of Simplicity;  
The Virtue of Patience;  
The Improvement of Talent;  
The Joy of Originating.

-- Marshall Field

(From a bookmarker by the Pennsyl-  
vania Guild of Craftsmen, Bucks Co.  
Chapter, and belonging to the late  
Marjorie Ruth Ross, Ithaca weaver.)

### The Weavers.

With unsmiling faces are passing by the old weavers  
in staggering steps under the heavy load.  
They are bringing home the spun yarn  
to last them for the week.

From the bundles are crowding out the threads  
in their pockets clicks the meager wage,  
and deeply they bend over their faces toward the ground;  
thus carried the father, thus carries on the son.

Mute they drag along in dull silence  
for talking they lack desire and time.  
The gray road of life thus  
leads them on to their eternity.

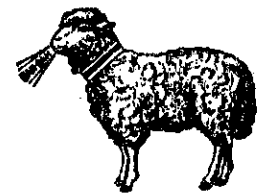
### 43. Die Weber.



Jost Ammann

Ernst gehn vorbei die alten Weber;  
von schwerer Bürde schwankt der  
Schritt;  
sie tragen für die ganze Woche  
gesponnen Garn nach Hause mit.  
Die Fäden drängen aus den Bünd-  
eln,  
im Sade flirrt der lerge Lohn,  
und tief neigt sich das Haupt zu  
Boden --  
so trug's der Vater, trägt's der  
Sohn . . .  
Stumm ziehn sie hin im stumpfen  
Schweigen,  
so zu Reden fehlt's an Lust und  
Zeit --  
so führt die graue Lebensstraße  
sie still in ihre Ewigkeit.

Marie Stora



"Where women sat  
beside their looms,  
A hundred years ago,  
And wove in cloth the  
threads they spun  
Of linen, wool and  
and tow,  
Now great King Steam,  
in workshops large  
Like some old giant  
elf,  
Gets up with angry  
puff and roar  
And does the work  
himself."

--Luranah Hammond  
1897



Weaver John

Down in a cottage lives Weaver John,  
and a happy old soul is he;  
Maud is the name of his dear old dame,  
and a blessed old dame is she.

Wickety, wackety, click and clack,  
How the shuttles do glance and ring,  
Hear they go, there they go,  
forth and back, chorus  
And a sociable song they sing.

Pussy is frisking about on the floor,  
with her kittens, one, two, three, four.  
Towser is taking his wonted nap  
On the settle behind the door.

Chorus

Soft as the hum of the dame's low wheel  
Does the music of time roll on;  
Morning and noon of a useful life,  
Bring a peacefully setting sun.

Chorus

From a children's book from 1888  
Sunshine all The Year Round  
"a choice collection of Poetry, Games,  
Stories, and Songs"

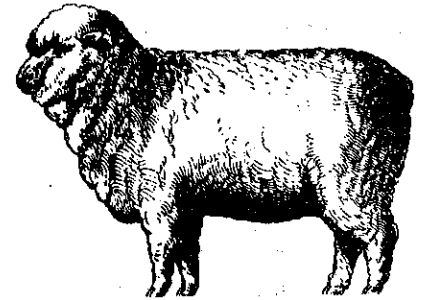
This poem is set to music with these  
instructions:

"For the chorus the arms form half curves,  
and move in and out like shuttles."

The fairy witch of Scottish peasants is a Nordic, named Gyre Carline. You must look to her for skill in spinning and if you are lucky, she will grant it to you. She also comes to your home on New Year's Eve to inspect your wheel, which you must leave with the drive band loose and the bobbins empty. If you have left a partly-full bobbin on the wheel, she will spin up the rest for you, but she will mutter and curse you for being lazy.

(From Spin, Span, Spun by Bette Hochberg, 1979)

(Ed.'s Note: I wonder if she dusts, too? -- JW)



PUBLICATIONS FOR SPINNERS. In addition to the wealth of books now available about spinning, dyeing, and weaving, periodicals are not in short supply. Some of the following, we Black Sheep guild members receive for our library already; some we do not. In the event you might some or all of these useful, here is a list of U.S. publications and where to order a copy or subscribe...

-- Jean Warholic

SPIN OFF!, Interweave Press, 306 North Washington, Loveland, Colo. 80537. Five issues per year (annual big magazine, four other issues); \$10.00 per year.

Aimed primarily toward spinners, dyers.

HANDMADE, 50 College Street, Asheville, NC 28801. Quarterly; \$14.00 per year.

Aimed primarily toward dyers, weavers, fiber artists.

SHUTTLE, SPINDLE & DYEPOT, Handweavers Guild of America, 65 LaSalle Street, New Hartford, CT 06107. Quarterly; \$15.00 per year. For weavers, dyers, spinners.

HANDWOVEN, Interweave Press, 306 North Washington, Loveland, CO 80537. Quarterly; \$15.00 per year. Aimed toward weavers, dyers.

FIBERARTS, 50 College Street, Asheville, NC 28801. Bi-monthly; \$15.00 per year. For fiber artists of all inclinations, textile oriented.

THE CRAFTS REPORT, P.O. Box 1992, Wilmington, DE 19899. Monthly; \$14.50 per year. For crafts people who are trying to make a living at their craft.