

Calls Tapestry Weaving a Panacea For Overwrought Feminine Nerves

Pupil of Frida Hansen
Teaches American Women to Forget Problems
While Weaving Pictures.

Mrs. Bertha Aske Bergh and one of her tapestries, "The Goose Girl and the King's Son," woven in the manner fashionable in Norway in the days of the Crusaders. The wool used was hand-carded, handspun and vegetable-dyed, all in the ancient manner.

Everybody knows that the best thing to do with troubles is to forget them—but how? That is the problem which Mrs. Bertha Aske Bergh feels she has solved. Try tapestry weaving, she advises. As a matter of fact (and this is in confidence), she considers tapestry making the answer to a good many of the problems to which modern woman is heiress.

Are your children too grown up to require—or permit—motherly attentions? Are you on the verge of a breakdown or just recovering from one? Have you too much time on your hands? Have you so little time that you are running around in circles? Are you aching to express your unappreciated artistic temperament? Or are you just plain out of sorts?

Then, says Mrs. Bergh, look around you, find a good subject for a wall piece, a curtain or a chair cover—your pet cat sitting on the back fence, the neighbors' children playing games, any subject that appeals to you—and start in to learn to weave it. By the time you can do it, and it takes only three or four months to become proficient, the unsolvable problems of your existence will have shrunk into nothingness and let themselves be blown away.

Mrs. Bergh is not theorizing, either. She has been weaving tapestries herself all her life and has for several years taught other women the ancient art. Until a few months ago she used in Brooklyn; now for

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Mrs. Bergh is not theorizing, either. She has been weaving tapestries herself all her life and has for several years taught other women the ancient art. Until a few months ago she lived in Brooklyn; now, for business reasons, she makes her home in Manhattan, but she is still a member of the Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce and she still regards Brooklyn as one of the centers of appreciation of Norwegian art. For one thing, the Brooklyn Museum has on display several Norwegian tapestries dating back hundreds of years. It is Norwegian pictorial weaving in which Mrs. Bergh is most interested, though she has made a study of every form of pictorial weaving and is an authority on the subject of tapestries in general. Her own method of tapestry making, and the one which she teaches her pupils, is the oldest type of weaving, she believes, that has ever existed. Bits of weavings done in this style have been found in the tombs of the Vikings of Norway, dating long before Christ, and the only similar tapestries that have been discovered were brought to light after centuries of burial in Egypt, in the graves of the prehistoric people of Peru and in some parts of China.

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As might be inferred, the Norse method which Mrs. Bergh teaches is very simple—almost primitive. The results, however, as attested in Mrs. Bergh's own home, are wonderfully lovely. Tapestries worth from \$40 to \$40,000 cover her walls, are used on tables and chairs and are laid away safely in trunks and boxes. They are all made in what the owner describes as a lock-stitch, on a small loom that takes up little space and is light enough for a woman to carry about. On the floor, it stands a little higher than the ordinary chair-seat and it is perhaps four feet across. The weaving is done entirely by hand, the loom acting as nothing much more than a frame, and the shuttle of the modern loom is absent, its place being taken by an ordinary table fork.

"After only six weeks of instruction my pupils are able to make small pieces," said Mrs. Bergh proudly, displaying some really delightful bits of work each no larger than a man's pocket handkerchief. One showed the maker's large, sleek-looking pussy cat standing beneath a tree in her backyard, the cat's shadow falling

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realistically upon the snow that covered the ground.

"Some of my tapestries have been woven on looms as old as 400 years," Mrs. Bergh declared. "There is nothing to wear out, and as long as the wood lasts these looms are every bit as good as new ones."

Her pupils, oddly enough, are mostly society women.

"They break engagements and curtail other activities in order to get more time for this work," she laughed with immense satisfaction. Blue-eyed and dimpled, she herself does not look within ten years of the age she gave as hers, and she attributes her youthful appearance and happy outlook to the work that has claimed her attention since she was a very young girl.

It happened that she lived in Stavanger, Norway, in those days, and Mrs. Frida Hansen, acknowledged the greatest tapestry weaver of modern times, lived in the same town. Mrs. Hansen, who died last year at the age of 74, was then a young woman, with a studio not far from Mrs. Bergh's girlhood home. The latter became interested in the work of the neighborhood genius and was irresistibly drawn to the studio to watch her at the task which used to occupy women in the days of the Crusaders and long before. Seeing the girl's evident talent, Mrs. Hansen undertook to teach the future Mrs. Bergh her own method of weaving, with the result that the latter became an apt pupil and a bond of friendship grew up between the two women and was broken only by death.

Some of the tapestries now in Mrs. Bergh's possession are the work of Frida Hansen, among them the magnificent "Southward," which was recently exhibited at the National Museum in Washington, D. C. It is among Mrs. Hansen's greatest work and is hung between two rooms at Mrs. Bergh's home, with an arrangement of lights that permits the luminous quality of the tapestry—a very rare attribute—to be seen. The piece represents the seven goddesses of Norse mythology riding South on the backs of young swans, taking with them the sun, heat and flowers they had brought North for the summer days. The water, the reins of the swans and the dresses of the goddesses are cleverly interwoven with sterling silver thread in a loose weave that, when the tapestry is viewed by transmitted light, gives the effect of phosphorescence on the water and dewdrops on the garments of the sea maidens.

More than 20 years ago Mrs. Bergh came to this country, bringing with her some tapestry patterns especially designed for her by Mrs. Hansen. Ever since she has worked for the recognition of Norwegian tapestries here, and it is probably due to her untiring efforts that this branch of Norwegian handicraft is now accorded a high place among the arts. The

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cov- Norwegian Government itself has
 been asked her co-operation in establish-
 ars." ing here a new Norwegian art center
 loth- which it is planned to open next fall.
 the As for the nerve-quieting proper-
 y bit ties of tapestry weaving, Mrs. Bergh
 says they are due to the absorbing na-
 ture of the work.
 "Four hours seem like one over a
 loom," she explained, "and most of
 most- my pupils become interested in their
 work that I think they wouldn't no-
 cur- tice if the whole world fell away so
 get long as the portion occupied by the
 ghed loom and themselves was left stand-
 eyed ing!"
 not So she continues, happily, to teach
 she the art of her ancestors to modern
 her women, who are as far removed as
 out- possible from the ladies who sat cen-
 imed turies ago far North in the Land of
 very the Midnight Sun weaving the ex-
 ploits of their men into wall coverings
 that were needed to keep out the
 drafts. Nowadays, the motives are
 different; frequently the tapestry is
 intended as a unique bridal gift for
 a daughter or granddaughter. Never-
 theless, the pendulum of time swings
 a bit more smoothly for the women
 who indulge in this art and they
 seem to gain for themselves a little
 of that restful calm that marked the
 days of ancient ladies of wealth and
 position.

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