The Old Weavers.

In the days when the spinning-wheels hummed busily in the farm-house, and even great bobbins, clothed in silk and thread lines, had their top spinning-wheels of polished oak, there might be seen in districts far away from among the lanes, or deep in the bosoms of the hills, certain tall, undressed men, who, by the side of the brazen country folk, looked like the remains of a despised race. The shepherd's dog barked fiercely when one of those tall, looking men appeared on the plain, dast against the early winter sunset; for what dog likes a figure that bears a heavy bag and these pale men rarely strayed abroad without that mysterious burden. The shepherd himself, though he had good reason to believe that the bag held nothing but flaxen thread, or else the long rolls of strong linen spun from that thread, was not quite sure that the trade of weaving, indispensable though it was, could be carried on without the help of the Evil One. In that Set-off time, superstition hung easily around every person or thing that was at all unaccustomed, or even intermittent and occasional merely, like the visit of the peddler or the knif-grinder. No one knew where wandering men had their homes or their origin; and how was a man to be explained, unless you at least knew somebody who knew his father or mother? To the peasants of olden times, the world outside their own distinct existence was a region of vagueness and mystery. To their untraveled thought, a state of wandering was a conception as dismal as the winter life of the swallows that came back with the spring; and even a seafarer, if he came from distant ports, hardly ever ceased to be viewed with a remnant of distrust, which would have prevented any surprise, if a long course of inoffensive conduct on his part had not insisted in the commission of a crime; especially if he had any skill in handicraft. All cleverness, whether in the rapid use of that skilled instrument, the spool, or in some other art unfamiliar to the villagers, was in itself suspicious. Honest folk, born and bred in a vincible manner, were mostly not wise nor sly; at least, not beyond the matter of knowing the signs of the weather, and the process by which rapidity and density of any kind were acquired was so wholly hidden that it was part of the nature of conjuring. In this way weavers—emigrants from the town into the country—were, to the last, regarded as aliens by their rustic neighbors, and usually contracted the eccentric habits which belong to a state of loneliness. — U. S. R. E. Comstock.