

The Old Weavers.

IN the days when the spinning-wheels hummed busily in the farm-houses, and even great ladies, clothed in silk and thread laces, had their toy spinning-wheels of polished oak, there might be seen in districts far away from among the lanes, or deep in the bosom of the hills, certain pallid, undersized men, who, by the side of the brawny country folks, looked like the remnants of a disinherited race. The shepherd's dog barked fiercely when one of these alien-looking men appeared on the upland, dark against the early winter sunset; for what dog likes a figure bent under a heavy bag? and these pale men rarely stirred 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 far-off time, superstition clung easily around every person or thing that was at all unwonted, or even intermittent and occasional merely, like the visits of the peddler or the knife-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 direct experience was a region of vagueness and mystery. To their untraveled thought, a state of wandering was a conception as dim as the winter life of the swallows that came back with the spring; and even a settler, if he came from distant parts, 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 ended in the commission of a crime; especially if he had any skill in handicraft. All cleverness, whether in the rapid use of that difficult instrument, the tongue, or in some other art unfamiliar to the villagers, was in itself suspicious. Honest folks, born and bred in a visible manner, were mostly not over-wise nor clever; at least, not beyond the matter of knowing the signs of the weather; and the process by which rapidity and dexterity of any kind were acquired was so wholly hidden that it partook 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. Economist.*