



# THE MODERN BASKET MAKER

BY MARY WHITE.

OF long ago the term basketmaker brought to one's mind the picture of an Indian woman working roots and grasses into intricate designs on baskets which took months, even years, to complete. Or one thought of the Japanese workman weaving strips of cane into marvellous forms and stitches. In those days baskets of all kinds, even the simple every-day ones, were thought to be fearfully and wonderfully made. Now, to many of us the word suggests a different picture, or rather a series of pictures, in which the central figure is a self-supporting woman of to-day. She takes as kindly to basketry as did her Indian sister, finding it not a secret process, painfully and slowly learned, but a simple and fascinating

craft, full of possibilities. If she is naturally deft with her fingers in sewing, knitting, or embroidery, if she has artistic taste either cultivated or latent, if she is inventive, she finds basketry not only a delightful occupation, but one that may be exceedingly profitable. One has only to look at the baskets in any confectioner's or florist's windows to realize what a field there is for attractive and new designs in baskets of this class. Then there are the baskets that every one needs—scraps baskets, work baskets, and wall pockets. If these are well made and of good form and color they are readily sold at exchanges and stores, or at private sale. Moreover, our modern basketmaker weaves baskets adapted to individual needs. One who delights in having everything about her of exclusive design will be charmed to find that she can have baskets made to harmonize with the color scheme of each room. At the same time, her own ideas of beauty and usefulness in regard to size and shape are carried out. Orders come to the basketmaker for bonnet baskets so strong that they do not crush, as pasteboard boxes do, in packing. Flat, wide baskets with shallow curving sides are ordered for pet dogs to doze in, and dainty travelling work baskets for globe-trotting friends. Again she is called upon to repair precious baskets full of associations—and holes! She who has a talent for teaching has more than she can do, for basketry has proved itself a most valuable branch of manual training. It exercises the eye in proportion, form, and color, and the hand in dexterity and applied strength. Children in primary classes, who have already learned in kindergarten how to weave in paper, thoroughly enjoy using more durable materials in fashioning pretty and serviceable little mats and baskets. Teaching boys' clubs and classes in settlements is another branch of the work. The boys find it interesting and profitable, and take pride in making their baskets strong and practical, and in filling orders in a business-like way.

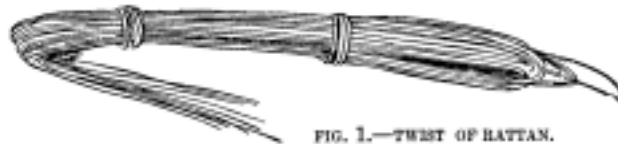


FIG. 1.—TWIST OF RATTAN.



FIG. 2.—UNDER-AND-OVER WEAVING.

One of the most remarkable things about basketry, the enthusiastic worker will tell you, is that one might give years to the study and practice of it and yet have more to learn; although so simple are most of the stitches that in a few lessons one can make baskets that will astonish one's friends and one's self.

The materials most used at first are rattan and raffia. Rattan is a kind of palm which grows in the forests of India. It twines about the trees and hangs in graceful festoons from the branches, sometimes to the length of five hundred feet, though seldom over an inch in diameter. It comes to us split into round or flat strips of various sizes, which are numbered by the manufacturer from 00 to about 15, No. 00 being the finest as well as the most costly. Rattan is sold at basket factories usually in five-pound lots.

Numbers 2, 3, and 4 are the best sizes for small baskets, and 3, 5, and 6 for scrap baskets. Raffia, which is woven into small baskets, dolls' hats, etc., comes from Madagascar. It is a pale yellow material, soft and pliable, the outer cuticle of a palm, and can be bought at seed stores or of dealers in kindergarten supplies, in hanks of about a pound each.

The flat or braided rush which is imported by wholesale basket dealers comes in natural colors, dull green and soft wood-brown. The flat rush is sold by the pound, and the braided in bunches of ten metres each. Woven on rattan spokes, it makes beautiful baskets.

Few tools are needed—a pair of strong sharp shears, a yard-stick, and a deep paper pail for water at first, and later a short steel knitting-needle about the size of No. 4 rattan, and a sharp knife.

The rattan, as it comes from the

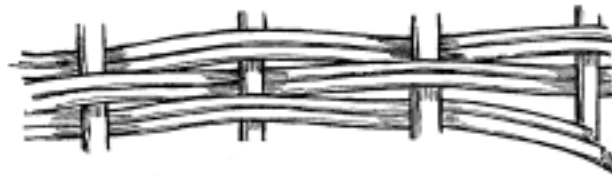


FIG. 3.—DOUBLE WEAVING.

manufacturer, is in long twists or skeins (see Fig. 1). It should be drawn out, as it is needed, from the loop end; otherwise it will get tangled and broken. In preparing it, the spoke or heavy material which is to form the ribs of the basket is cut into lengths of the required number of inches. The weaver is wound into circles of about seven inches in diameter, the ends being twisted in and out several times to prevent unwinding. As rattan is very brittle, it should be put to soak, before using, for half an hour in cold water.

Weaving.—Under-and-over weaving, the simplest form of all, is the one most used.

Double weaving is done in the same way, except that two weavers are used at once. Pairing may be woven either on an odd or even number of spokes.

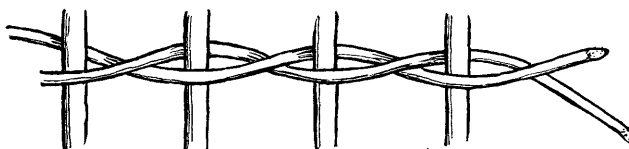


FIG. 4.—PAIRING.

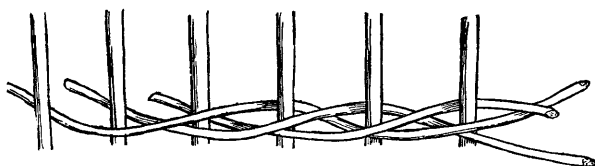


FIG. 5.—TRIPLE TWIST.

Two weavers are started behind two succeeding spokes, and crossed between them, so that what was the under weaver becomes the upper one each time.

In the triple twist, three weavers are placed behind three consecutive spokes and brought in succession, starting with the back one, over two and under one spoke, each on its way to the back of the third spoke being laid over the other two weavers. In turning up the sides of large baskets, where separate spokes or additional spokes have been inserted, or as a strong top for scrap baskets, this weave is invaluable.

It is a rare thing to find a material at once so soft and so strong as raffia, and it is admirably fitted for the work of untrained fingers. A charming work bag is made as follows :

KNOTTED WORK BAG.

*Materials:* Twenty-four strands of raffia; a stick about a yard long and 1½ inches wide, a pair of scissors, a tapestry needle.

The stick is held by the left hand at right angles with the body, the end resting on a chair or table. A strand of raffia is doubled and tied around the stick, as shown in Fig. 6, the knot being drawn up quite close. Twenty-four strands are knotted on in this way: they are then placed about an inch apart, and beginning with the inner one of the two strands nearest the workman, it is knotted, at about an inch from the first row of knots, with the strand nearest it in the next pair, making an even mesh. This is continued across the stick, and another row is knotted, and another, until ten or twelve rows have been made, when the work will tend toward a V shape (see Fig. 7, which for convenience is drawn with fewer strands). The stick is now slipped out and the bag finished (see Fig. 8) by knotting first the two loose strands at the top together, then the two pairs following, and so on until the bottom is reached. The two

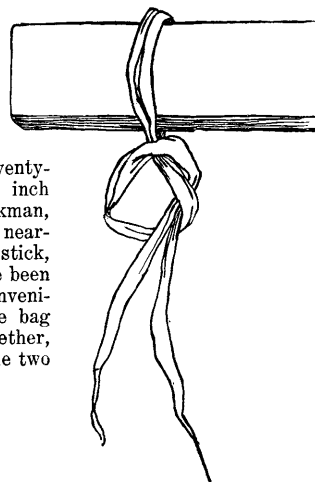


FIG. 6.

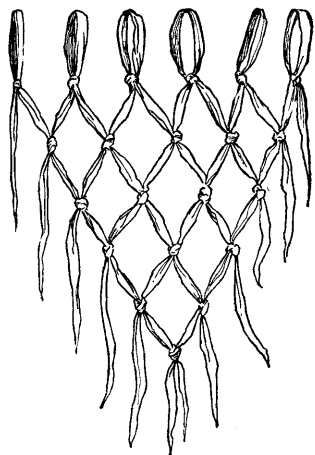


FIG. 7.

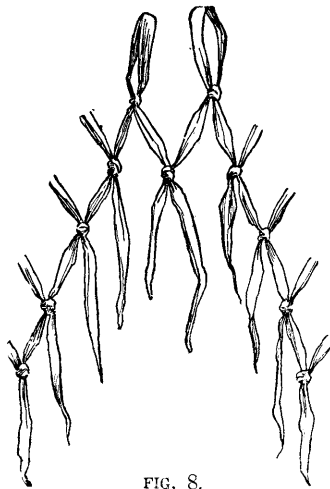


FIG. 8.

sides are joined at the bottom by placing them with the meshes and knots evenly together and knotting two strands from the front and two from the back together each time in a last row.

The bag is finished with a row of raffia tassels across the bottom, a cord of twisted raffia drawn through the top loops, and an inner lining of harmonious color.

We shall use raffia later on in combination with rattan, and still later, dyed in beautiful soft colors, it will be a help in working out Indian stitches.

The centre, or bottom, of the basket is made at first in the form of a

MAT WITH OPEN BORDER NO. 1.

*Materials:* Four 12-inch spokes of No. 4 rattan; one 7-inch spoke of No. 4 rattan; one weaver of No. 2 rattan.

The four spokes, arranged in pairs, are crossed in the centre, the vertical ones being uppermost or nearest the person weaving; and between the upper halves of these vertical spokes the half spoke seven inches long is placed. These are held in position by the left hand. An end of the weaver previously unwound is placed along the horizontal spoke back of the vertical ones with the end toward the right. The forefinger of the right hand presses the weaver across the upper vertical spokes and down behind the horizontal ones on the right (thus binding the end of the weaver securely), next over the lower vertical spokes, and behind the horizontal ones on the left (see Fig. 9). This is repeated, and then, beginning with the upper vertical spokes, the spokes are separated and the weaving begins (see Fig. 10). A common fault of beginners is to pull the weaver from a distance of several inches from the work; instead, it should be pressed with the forefinger, under and over the spokes, as close to the work as it is possible to get it. The spokes should be very evenly separated. When there is just enough weaver left to go around once, the binding-off is begun. This is a process much like over-casting. After going under one spoke and over another, the weaver is passed under the last row of weaving just before it reaches the next spoke; it then goes behind that spoke, in front of the next and under the last row of weaving before the next spoke. When a row of this binding is completed, the mat is finished with Open Border No. 1. After

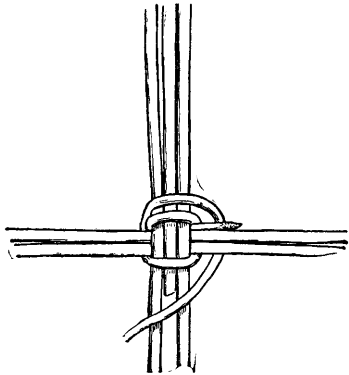


FIG. 9.

cutting the spokes to a uniform length with a slanting cut (so that the point may be easily pushed down between the weavers), the spokes are wet until pliable. Spoke No. 1 is pushed down beside spoke No. 2, spoke No. 2 beside No. 3, and so on around the mat, pressing at least an inch below the edge.

In weaving the first baskets, while the worker is getting familiar with her material, she should copy simple forms. One such is a

BASKET WITH ROUNDING SIDES AND OPEN BORDER NO. 2.

*Materials:* Four 14-inch spokes of No. 3 rattan; one 8-inch spoke of No. 3 rattan; two weavers of No. 2 rattan.

Having made a bottom about two inches in diameter, wet the spokes and turn them up, rounding them by bending them over the middle finger. It should be remembered always that the side toward the person weaving is the outside of the basket, and that the weaving should go from left to right. The first weaver should not be drawn too tight, but allowed to go easily, though pressed closely down upon the weaving just below it.

In joining weavers the ends are crossed at an inch from the tip of

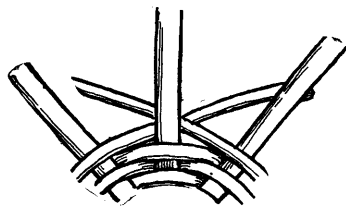


FIG. 11.—JOINING WEAVERS.

each, back of a spoke (see Fig. 11). Before the middle of the second weaver is reached the spokes should be gradually drawn closer together by a slight tightening of the weaver; this should continue to the end of the weaver. Bind off and finish with Open Border No. 2. Spokes of at least four inches long, measuring from the last row of weaving, are required for this border. Cut and soak as described in Open Border No. 1. Spoke No. 1 crosses No. 2 and is pushed down beside No. 3. No. 2 crosses No. 3 and is pushed down beside No. 4, and so on around the basket.

This makes a pretty little candy basket, especially if it is stained or dyed attractively.

(To be continued.)

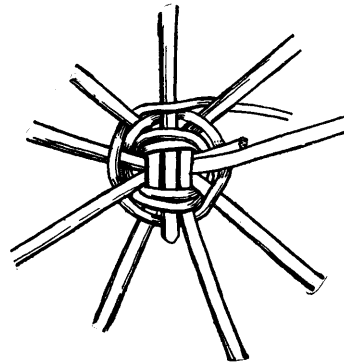


FIG. 10.

