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Nebraska
COOPERATIVE EXTENSION WORK
IN AGRICULTURE AND HOME ECONOMICS
1929 U. of N. Agr. College & U. S. Dept. of Agr. Cooperating
W. H. Brokaw, Director, Lincoln
Extension
Circular
5550

SPENDING THE HOMEMAKER'S HOURS
Clara Ingram Judson

There are two ways of taking work out of housework. The first is to do less work; the second to work more effectively, saving both time and effort.

By doing less work one does not mean letting beds go unmade, dishes unwashed or the family unfed. The home must be run with orderly care, meals must be nourishing and appetizingly served and the house must be clean. But there is a happy medium between neglect which lowers efficiency and happiness, and the fussy, over-particular care which pampers the family and makes of the mother a slave, a martyr or both.

No matter how busy or tired she is, there is one task every housekeeper should do and do well - her own thinking.

It's high time every woman made an efficiency expert of herself and overhauled her own job.

"But I'm too busy", exclaims some one. "I have my hands full every day. What time have I for studying my job?"

That excuse is no alibi; it is merely the proof that her job needs studying. She above all others, is the one who can not afford not to study!

Start today. Take the first task of the morning. Or, if the father must get off early and the children are in a scramble for school, wait until they are all gone and then take an inventory of tasks to be done, and later in the day think over the early morning work. What would you naturally do first after the children are gone? Why do this job? Is it necessary? Do you do it in the easiest possible way?

Then the next task. Why do it? Is it necessary? Do you do it in the easiest possible way? Don't fear being lazy. It is just as thrifty to save effort as it is to save cash; waste of either time or money never brings success.

In the olden days the housekeeper who was everlastingly on her job, who worked from sunrise until sunset and then tackled her sewing in the evening was held up as a shining light. Not so now. We know there is too much interesting and useful work needing to be done outside in our larger housekeeping or inside in many activities we might enjoy or profit by, to spend a single minute in unimportant work or in wasteful methods. The model housekeeper of this year is the woman who works with such judgment and skill that she does not have to work all day.

"It's all very well to talk theory," says someone, "but I wish you'd come to my house and tell me what to leave out!"

Very well, look at your living room. Is it easy to clean? Have you any unnecessary pictures, vases, pillows, curtains or the like? Every single article in that room ought to have its purpose - you should actually need it there for use or for beauty. How many wedding presents, prizes and gifts - to say nothing of one's own reckless purchases - would have to hurry out of the room if we used that test. The Japanese fashion of enjoying one ornament at a time is an excellent one. A room freed of useless frippery is not bare, it is restful, beautiful and easy to clean. This does not mean that rooms should be barren - it's the useless things - the unbeautiful things that we want to take away. Useful or beautiful things are well worth taking care of.

Now visit the dining room. Could its arrangement be improved? Is the service table conveniently placed? Is silver that is not needed daily kept out on the buffet or is it wrapped away in camphor?

How about the bed rooms? Is the family trained to air beds, to pick up personal effects? Are the linen closets and clothes basket so placed that even youngsters can get out their own towels and put away soiled clothing? The mother who with thoughtless, intended kindness, "picks up" after a child of five, gets out a towel, straightens a closet, makes herself work and indefinitely worse gives her child a training in dependency. If each member of the family gets the habit of caring for personal belongings, the mother is saved at least an hour in the best part of the morning. And better still the family gets an invaluable training they will appreciate later on.

By this time the woman who has looked at every particle of her work with a question mark in her eye will have caught the habit. And once one gets started, it's astonishing how many useless tasks we can discover.

In this thrifty frame of mind the housekeeper comes to the time honored question, "What shall we eat today?" and asks, "How much of my cooking time is spent for actually feeding my family? How much for social pleasure?" For it must be remembered that the table is the meeting place and a certain amount of care and time may justifiably be spent making meal time comfortable and happy. But one can not help the follow-up question, "How much of my time at the cook stove is just convention - just for cooking things we are used to but might be happy without?"

So much for the daily, routine tasks. Now let us think about the rest of the housework, and see what a critical survey will do for us there.

Are all the tasks you plan to do important enough to justify the use of your time? It's a hard thing to judge of this if one works from job to job as most of us do. But by planning ahead the relative importance of several apparently needed duties can be determined. I have found it useful to list the tasks I expect to do each week and then, from my list, eliminate the ones that could be left undone in case I can not do everything.

Sometime before Monday morning, on Sunday evening if possible, I write out on a tablet a list of all the things I think I have to do that week. Not the three meals a day and the dish washing and bed making, but all the extra things -

canning, dressmaking, shopping, entertaining company, church or civic work, extra cleaning and such. Usually there is listed about enough to keep two women busy the whole week. Obviously one can not do it all. So I study thru the list and cross off such things as can wait until another week (maybe I will later find they can go undone); cross off anything that, compared with other duties seems less important, and then, Monday, I begin the doing of what is left. As each special task is finished I cross it off - there's a thrill of accomplishment about checking off finished tasks that I find very pleasant. And I also have the satisfaction of knowing that the jobs I spend my hours doing are jobs that I really and truly know are the right ones to do at that time.

Of course unexpected events come up and tasks get pushed ahead until another time. By having them written down, I can decide which ones I most want to do in the time remaining and that, I find is much easier than carrying them in mind. Having it down in black and white is a real help toward straight thinking and well repays the slight time spent in list making.

So much for eliminating work. How can we increase our skill so as to save time and effort?

First, by questioning every method and making sure that we use the best. This isn't so easy, either, for we women have a habit of doing things the time honored ways! But by careful reading of articles on methods; by getting the newest state university bulletins and studying them; and by comparing notes (open mindedly) with other housekeepers, we can improve our ways of working.

Then a careful study of labor-saving devices pays, but buy only what you are certain will actually be helpful in your work. Each additional utensil is just that much more for which to care. Make it pay for its keep. Be sure each tool you use is the best type for your work. Anything else merely clutters your work shop.

There is an old proverb that is the housekeeper's best friend. "A place for everything and everything in its place". How much time do you spend in a day, a week, a year, hunting for things? Study your home, room by room, and see that you make a logical, convenient place for each thing you own. Then set about the long, difficult, but oh, so worth while task, of training yourself and your family to keep things where they belong. It can be done. And it pays.

Of course, these and many other suggestions that might be offered will not take all the work out of housework. But each housekeeper who gives critical thought to simplifying her work and improving her methods will find her time well spent. And time, nowadays, is the most costly commodity there is. We should save our time as we save our money, for saving of time and strength means less sickness, more happiness and enjoyment in the home, and more energy left over for enriching life.