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Mabel Sensor

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COOPERATIVE EXTENSION WORK
IN AGRICULTURE AND HOME ECONOMICS

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U. of N. Agr. College & U. S. Dept. of Agr. Cooperating
W. H. Brokaw, Director, Lincoln

SOME QUILTING THOUGHTS

by

Mabel Sensor

Editor of Home Department of Dakota Farmer

"No doubt every woman is interested in quilt blocks, either through making one or having an almost priceless old-fashioned quilt in her possession made by a dear relative. There is a fascination about them that it is sometimes hard to explain.

"As one handles the beautiful quilt blocks the thought comes that the blocks express beauty in much the same way that beauty is expressed in music, in painting, or in many of the other arts. Just as music has a central theme which repeats itself over and over—the same theme but made different by different setting, different shading, so the blocks in the quilt, all of the same or related design, but of different colors, combine to make the beauty of the quilt. And then the thought comes how life is like music or like quilt making. The bright spots stand out to make the theme or the pattern, but the background must be more drab.

"Some quilt designs with but few really bright spots are the prettiest if the best possible use is made of those bright spots. Some lives that seem mostly drab, when viewed as a whole, have their bright spots and are really the most beautiful. What makes light, lilting strains of music, bright colors in quilts, bright spots in our lives? It is the happiness and joy that is put into them that lifts them above the commonplace, and our mental reaction to that joy.

"In quilts so much depends on the dyes. Two colors may be equally bright today. But as the days go on, one fades because it does not have lasting qualities, and faded, it becomes uglier than the drab background which supported it because it is more conspicuous through being where a bright color should be.

"So with our good times. Some things may be very appealing and alluring at the time we weave them into our life's pattern, but how foolish to choose them when we know they will look faded and dirty when we look back upon them and wish we had not sewed in this or that. Joys, as quilt pieces, must be pure and true to be lasting—to always make our eye sparkle and brighten at its memory. We must never put in a piece that later we would be ashamed of.

"Quilt designs may be of exactly the same number of pieces, cut in exactly the same shapes, just as our weeks are cut into exactly as many days or our days in exactly as many hours, yet what a variety of quilts and of lives are made just by the use of different combinations and colors. And there must be routine, repetition, even drabness, or total lack of color, to bring out the beauty of the whole.

"If a quilt or a life were all brightness, it would be glaring, uninteresting, tiring.

"In many beautiful quilts the blocks are set together with plain blocks or strips, relieved only by the quilting designs. Sometimes these are just white blocks or unbleached ones, sometimes of a pretty color though not bright and always the same. So in our lives, this year most of us are quilting on a plain block--only our work to add beauty to it. Or it may be there is just a little corner of color to complete the design of the more fancy blocks, the rest of the block is plain. But when you do painstaking work on it, keep in mind that perhaps next year when you may again be working in many a bright color, that this well worked plain block is just as necessary to bring out the beauty of the completed quilt or life.

"Don't get careless; don't get discouraged; don't let down. We must keep our plain blocks up in beauty by the quality of workmanship to make them add to the beauty of the brighter pieced blocks.

"Every step of the road, whether it is cutting, piecing setting together, quilting, or finishing, must be equally well done. Every task in our life, as well as every joy, must be carefully done to complete the best quilt or to complete the best life. Some of the prettiest blocks are made of the smallest pieces. Some of the best lives are made wholly of little things. So as we make the best possible use of all of the little pieces, so we must make the best possible use of minutes as well as of hours.

"Some years we may make appliqued quilts--large bold designs cut from new goods, and sewed on to new goods. No danger of going far wrong as there is a square firm background to anchor to. Those are the years when the weather man smiles; it rains at the right times, crops are good; prices are good; there is a good square firm bank account to tie to.

"But other years we must use the pieces--the left-over pieces perhaps from those other flowery quilts. But we can take them and make just as much beauty by piecing them together a stitch at a time without any new goods or any background.

"So, without new clothes or a bank account we can still make beautiful lives. It is how we use our hours and minutes that count--use them in finding or creating beauty and joy. And somehow the pieced quilts always seem so much more beautiful, much more worth while than the appliqued ones.

"Many quilt blocks may be made after the same designs--ever so many Log Cabins, so many of Grandmother's Flower Garden, so many Drunkard's Paths--yet no two exactly alike. Some vary only in colors used or in quality of the goods; some differ in the type of work done on them; some differences are plainly mistakes made in placing the given pieces for each block; some are evidently purposely changed to make what is thought to be an improvement on the old design.

"When comparing these that were alike, yet so unlike, the thought comes of how like clubs they are. The Home Extension Clubs are given a plan; an outline of work and such plans are exactly alike when given out; but the true measure of the club is not the plan to which you are working but how well you have carried out the plan. Have you done all the work necessary to make a well balanced block? Have you maintained that repetition of effort necessary to complete the design? Were all meetings held? Were all demonstrations given? At the end of the year will you have

every piece in its proper place, well done? If you made changes from the original design, have those changes been real improvements? When the work of your club is set together with the work of the other clubs of the state, will they combine into a quilt having uniformity, completeness, lasting beauty; or is there a weak spot in the completed quilt because a club left out pieces or changed the design?

"If all of the women who made Log Cabin quilts had first gotten together and discussed the question, they would have considered all the different ways and probably would have decided upon one way as the correct one; and their blocks would have been much more uniform than they were. They would have learned the one best way by conferring together.

"Club members, by getting together in county and state-wide gatherings and discussing the plans laid out for them would get a bigger vision of what they are really all working for and the best way to accomplish the work that they can fit their clubs together into a state-wide effort of tremendous importance. When a member is working as a project leader or a demonstrator, she sometimes sees only the little square or triangle on which she is working and wonders if it is worth while. She should get the vision of the larger block or quilt and realize how necessary every little piece is to the whole. Some members may serve as background material, but they, too, are just as necessary as the bright spots of the design.

"These thoughts have been as rambling as the quilt blocks may be varied, but let us hope something has been said to help someone find beauty in drabness, repetition, hard work and to realize that all such are necessary to bring out the best things in lives and in clubs as well as in quilts."