

The Art of Using the Needle.
Thesis by
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Outline :

Introduction,

Needles,

various kinds

history^{and} manufacture

Needle-work,

in the various countries

decorative and practical

Sewing in the schools,

its introduction^{and} development

beneficial results

Conclusion.

"The needle, though it be but small and slender,
Yet it is both a maker and a mender;
A grand Reformer of old Rents decay'd,
Stops holes and seams and desperate cuts display'd."

The needle is a tiny instrument which belongs almost exclusively to woman, how essential then that she should be able to use it well and that she get all the art out of it which it is capable of yielding. That woman should sew seems to be a necessity; she has sewed through countless ages and probably will continue to do so as long as she exists.

"Till the world be quite dissolved and past,
So long at least the needle's use shall last."

Of the first efforts along this line we read in Genesis where Mother Eve sewed fig leaves together for covering.

"The use of sewing is exceedingly old,
As in the Sacred Text it is enroled."

Thus from the stems of leaves through thorns, bones, ivory, bronze & to the highly polished slender steel instrument in present use, we may trace a constant development both in the needle and its use.

It has been truly said that a perfect

lady sews only neatly and beautifully and thus we see character shining out clearly even in a single seam of the plainest garment made by hands which toil at the bidding of a noble mind; and, too, a lady is known by her dress even when surrounded by the most adverse circumstances, for how much more beautiful is a simple, neat, well-made garment, although it may be very inexpensive, than handsome or costly material made in a careless manner. Then, much of our happiness comes from the appearance which those around us present, and a good impression cannot be given without neatness and daintiness in personal belongings and this cannot be without neatness and delicacy of workmanship. It is therefore of some moment that the art of using the needle be cultivated in every girl.

To be able to use a needle well of course depends much upon the person, although it is to a great extent an acquired talent, yet good work cannot be accomplished with imperfect tools; a good needle is absolutely necessary and it is very trying, to say nothing of the loss in the appearance of the work done and of the time consumed, if one attempts

to use any but the best. The difficulty is perhaps most felt in handsewing and it is detrimental to good work to be obliged to sew with needles that "cut in the eye", bend easily or are brittle as many are.

Crochet needles should be very smooth and not too sharp. Those sold in sets are apt to be of inferior quality. In size they range from 12-24 inclusive. Knitting needles, also should be smooth. Steel ones are used for fine work and ivory or bone for coarser work. Tapestry needles are used for embroidering satin, cloth etc. Rug needles are large and are used for canvas work. Netting needles of various sizes are made of bone, ivory or wood. Beading needles are very long and slender as are also milliner's needles, and are of various sizes. Bodkins also vary in size and are made of gilt steel, bone or ivory. Darning needles are coarse or fine suitable for either cotton or coarse yarn. Perhaps one of the most convenient needles a lady can have in her work basket is a glove needle, as a break in her gloves can be repaired much more neatly with it than can possibly be done with a common needle.

But let us turn to the history of the

needle that we may see its development. Needles of bone are found in the caves occupied by the ancient inhabitants of France during the stone period, and the same material is in use among uncivilized tribes of the present day. The needles of ancient Egypt, as described by Wilkinson, were of bronze and had no eye. Needles of bronze were used by the Greeks and Romans as shown by the descriptions of Pliny and by their having been found in Herculaneum. The history of the progress in their manufacture during the middle ages is a blank, but we find that needles were manufactured at Nuremberg in 1370.

The history of their manufacture in England is involved in doubt, but it is said to have been introduced about 1543 or 45 either by a Spanish negro or a native of India who died without disclosing the secret of his process. It was recorded during the reign of Elizabeth by Growse, a German.

In 1630 Christopher Gunning and a Mr. Damer established needle factories at Long Ciedon near Redditch and were soon

followed by other needle manufacturers from London. Redditch is still the great centre of the English needle manufacture.

The earliest needles were "square eyed" being easiest to produce. Drill eyed needles were first successfully brought out in 1826. The burnishing machine, in which the needles are struck on a steel wire which rapidly revolves, was introduced two years latter. This imparts a beautiful finish to the eye.

The process of hardening in oil was introduced in 1840, water having been previously used, but this required large numbers of workmen to straighten them, as many became crooked during this process.

In 1755 a needle for handsewing and embroidery, with a point at each end and an eye in the middle, was patented in England. In 1829 it was successfully introduced into an embroidery machine which is still extensively used. As many as 130 such needles were employed in one machine.

The so-called gold eyed needles

are tinted by dipping in an ethereal solution of gold. The silver hue of the silver eyed needles is given by means of a peculiar polish. The blue pointing is effected by applying the needle to a rapidly revolving blue stone.

In its early days the needle must have been hailed as a valuable invention and as with many other things, women were probably not trusted with it; it was only a prerogative of the lords. But not until the needle had become so far refined as to become the delicate steel instrument of now-a-days did really fine needlework become a possibility.

The Phrygians and Hebrews held fine needlework in high estimation. The heroines of the Greek poems and of chivalric days spent their time with their tapestry embroidery when deserted by their heroes. But while among the relics of a misty past, hoarded in the museums of the old world, are to be seen altar cloths and winding sheets yellow with age and beautifully made

on the pulled threads of fine linen, yet the history of art progress during the middle ages is a blank.

The secret of this fine work was known only to the monks and was not revealed until the breaking up of the monasteries, when it was taken up by the nobility and those of leisure. Drawn work is perhaps the most ancient of decorative needle work and from it, associated with cut work and laced netting, was developed its "gossamer-winged offspring" - lace, at least the earliest oriental attempts at lace making were embodied in the drawn work of China^{and} Persia.

Among Europeans drawn work was early adopted by people of fashion. The grave clothes of St. Cuthbert, disinterred in the 12th. century are described by Reginald, Monk of Durham, as "fringed with linen thread of a finger's length, and adorned with a border fabricated of the thread itself, bearing the figures of birds and beasts, divided by a branching tree with leaves."

In England, Ireland, Russia, Denmark, Germany, Portugal, the west Indies, South America, and the Philippine islands where

it is made upon the strands of woven grass, this art holds high rank; but the finest specimens come from Italy or Spain, although they are rivaled by those of Mexico and the Southern States especially, of our own country.

But to turn to the practical side of this subject; for we cannot have the ideal without the real, the practical.

To take the close stitches in present use was probably at first considered a fastidious refinement, a waste of time in the ordinary walks of life. Originally it was enough and certainly accomplishing a great deal if the seams were strongly held together, and the advance must have been long and gradual before the putting together of delicate stitches, never to be seen, was considered as a part of woman's education.

But in spite of this realization it was not until the early part of this century that sewing was introduced into the schools. Any of our grandmothers will tell us the pleasant stories of how they used to put their folded "sampler"

under their arms and trudge off to school. And although nowadays more active occupations are found for women yet it is realized that plain sewing cannot be given up, that the sewing machine, though a great invention in itself cannot yet do it all. We still need a thorough instruction in sewing for our girls in the schools. They have to begin each of them separately to learn how to hold a needle, how to use a thimble and how to take small stitches and above all not to fall into bad and careless habits.

The general and growing interest in manual training speaks in favor of a judicious intermingling of manual and mental training. It is not expected that all girls will become proficient with the needle by this method, but every girl will get some ideas which will help to make better homes and hence give a stronger nation both mentally and physically.

When practical sewing shall become a necessary part of a girls education there will be less poverty among the masses, and no where can they be reached so

thoroughly as in the public school which is, with most of them, the limit of an education.

In the teaching of sewing it is necessary to have some definite and systematic scheme, but in following it the individuality of the child should not be overlooked. Small material should be used, long seams or large garments are wearisome to little hands and little minds.

Light, air and plenty of room are essential to any good sewing school. The superintendent should have plenty of assistance that each child may have the needed attention, it is also well to have a book of finished models for reference, but the ground plan of all schools of manual training is essentially the same, it is only in the details as to management and development that the greatest divergence is found.

The Boston School of Technology and Pratt Institute are perhaps the most noted but similar schools of more or less consequence are now found in nearly every city of any size throughout our

country. Our College claims to have been the first school in which Domestic Science was introduced, this is however a disputed point, as Perdu university and the agricultural college of Iowa also claim this honor, it was undoubtedly introduced in each about the same time. The credit of its introduction here belongs to Hon. John A. Anderson and for him the girls of this institution should retain a warm place in their hearts.

The Agricultural colleges of Iowa, North and South Dakota, Utah, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Oregon, Washington, Rhode Island, Louisiana, Florida and Tennessee now have this department, six of them employing at the present time graduates of the Kansas State Agricultural College.

It is claimed by those who have given the subject their most careful attention that the introduction of sewing into the schools results in bringing the home and school into a more intimate relationship, thus giving the teacher a better knowledge of the child's home influences enabling him to exert a more intelligent care over the child's

moral development and on the other hand gives parents an interest and insight into the management of the schools with an overflowing of the moral tone of schools into homes where intelligent discipline is unknown. Then again it creates a respect for manual labor and above all cultivates in childhood habits of neatness and industry.

When the art of sewing neatly becomes a part of every girls education; when every school in our grand Republic shall consider the art of using the needle gracefully a necessary step to the accomplishment of womanhood; when in every home in this continent, yes, in all this broad world of ours, where womankind is placed, the knowledge of needlework forms one round in the ladder of accomplishments; when every mother is brought to see and realize the effect which the careless or skillful, as the case may be, handling of the needle has on the moral and physical welfare of her children; when, in fine, civilization and education have reached their zenith, then shall the standard of womanhood be raised from the degradation of the past to a glorious height

in the new era, the morning light of which we already see; then shall our schools have added one more requirement which shall instill into the minds of their multitude of girls not only simple habits of neatness but a taste for that which is well and thoroughly executed; then shall our homes be the sweetest, the purest, the most beautiful; then and only then shall the vices which are only the results of the careless and slothful handling of the needle be put aside and we shall have instead gracefulness, purity and morality.

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