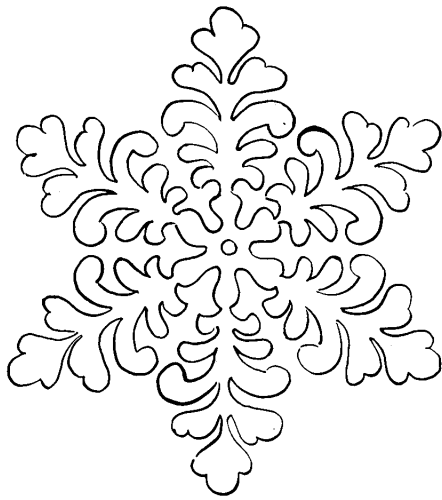


"SWEETLY PRETTY"

By *Ethel Davenport*



GREAT-GRANDMOTHER'S workstand was given to me when the heirlooms were distributed, and I opened the sewing box reverently, for everything in it was just as she had left it. There were the little hand-forged scissors, the emery strawberry, a little brass tube containing fine needles, some balls of colored thread and a long white envelope. I wondered what sort of treasure this could contain, and had visions for a moment of a lost will which would reverse everything! When I opened it, I found it contained some highly prized patterns, for Great-Grandmother had been a famous needlewoman and took "premiums" wherever her work was shown. The patterns were on stout, thin paper, and evidently had been drawn free-hand in the style of drawing taught to young ladies in the 1830's, or traced.

The spray of roses is no doubt intended for use with crewels, in satin stitch, for the veins and markings show where the stitch may be broken, though if embroidered today it would probably be done in outline stitch. Apparently it did not bother her at all that the buds were almost the size of the rose and that the leaves and thorns were borrowed from some other plant. There is the suggestion of a repeat by hiding the stem of the first rose under the last of the three leaves at the end of the spray, and a very definite reversed curve which could be continued indefinitely.

The oak spray with its line of circles must have been meant for white embroidery, the circles being stuffed and the leaves done half in knots and half in outline, or, perhaps, semi-solid. I am not familiar with any species of oak which has tendrils, but the tendril introduced in this pattern serves to steady the acorns and fills the space admirably.

The six-pointed snow crystal reminds us of the fine braiding done with tiny braids or hand-made cords on a silk ground, to be used on a lamp mat or cushion, and shows evidence of having been traced with great difficulty, as if the paper had slipped and thumbtacks were not available.



The method of planning corners usually reveals the sophistication of the designer, but corners had no terrors for her. We can see her method of making them in the scroll pattern. She simply drew a certain amount of the pattern on one sheet of paper, a corresponding number of units on another strip, and placed the two together until they seemed to fit. The occult balance was carefully preserved and the result naïve and rather charming. The two strips of paper are sewed together where they cross, as if they might be taken apart again and used separately. How were these designs transferred to the material? Grandmother told me once that when they found a pretty picture of a butterfly or flower on a good design in one of the "Lady's Books," they would hold the page up to the window pane and trace over the picture on thin paper to get units for their patterns. To transfer this to the material to be used, they could reverse the tracing, lead side down and retrace it, leaving a faint lead-pencil mark. As most of the work was done on linen, this worked very well. The scallops and curves lavished with such loving profusion on the flannel petticoat or baby's jacket were accurately and skilfully cut out of stiff paper or cardboard and the outlines traced directly on the flannel. Those in my envelope bore the marks of many tracings, and faint lines where the pencil had slipped.

There was nothing to indicate what colors had been used, — and, of course, for the white work none were required, — but when I looked up a piece of ribbon Great-Grandmother had embroidered for a belt, I found that she had a definite formula for color balance and value, based on the old scheme of "one light, one dark," which was drilled into our ancestresses when they sewed carpet rags or made patchwork squares. At the best, the choice of colors was limited to a few simple shades. Those used in the belt were a lemony gold, an old light blue, and old rose and a deep wine for the flowers, burnt orange for the stem and a bluish bottle green shaded with a crude apple green for the leaves. The ground is a deep ivory.

While a lot of the work done a hundred years ago seems to us merely quaint or naïve, there was a great deal of taste in its application, loving care in its execution, and more than a hint of happy industrious hours with a pride in a good piece of handicraft, well done.

