

# Patchwork Quilts You Cannot Buy

By FRANCES L. GARSIDE

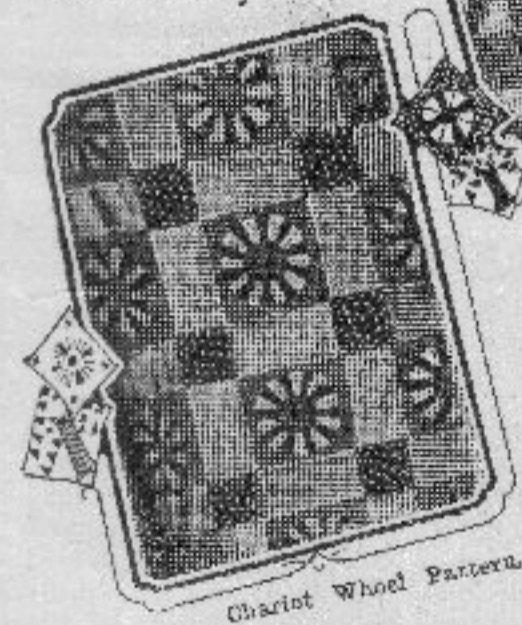
**M**ANY a dollar has lured many a family heirloom from many an ancient attic in old-time Fynes throughout the country. The owners loved the heirlooms, but needed the dollars more.

But there has been one thing the dollar has not been almighty enough to lure from any attic—at least not from any Southern attic—and that is the patchwork quilt that mother or grandmother, or even great-grandmother made with her own skillful fingers in the hallowed long-ago.

Stored in closets and attics throughout the South, and especially throughout Kentucky, Missouri and Tennessee, are great quantities of these old patchwork quilts, worth their weight, almost literally, in gold. And there they are destined to remain. In the homes of the wealthy and in the humble log cabins are they to be found, admired and left with the owners.

I once visited a log cabin in southern Missouri which did not boast of the luxury of a window screen, a curtain, or a rocking-chair. A bachelor brother and a spinster sister lived there together, and though they were past sixty they had never known any other home. They were born in that cabin. All their childhood had been spent there, and it was their greatest hope and fondest desire that they

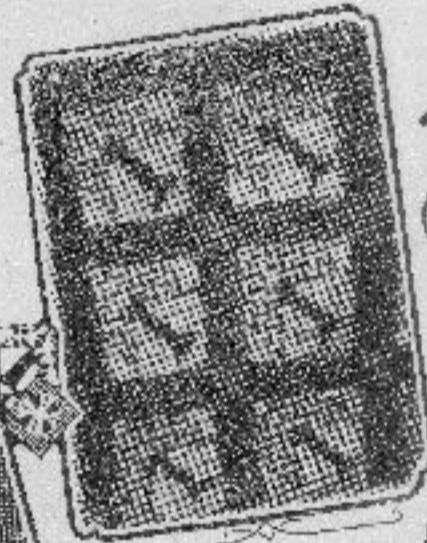
might spend their last days in their home. They were poor, almost desperately poor, but proud in their poverty, in a way that those less iron-bound by the family pride of the lowly can never understand. During the course of my call the spinster asked if I were interested in patchwork quilts.



Chariot Wheel Pattern



Kentucky Beauty



Tree of Paradise

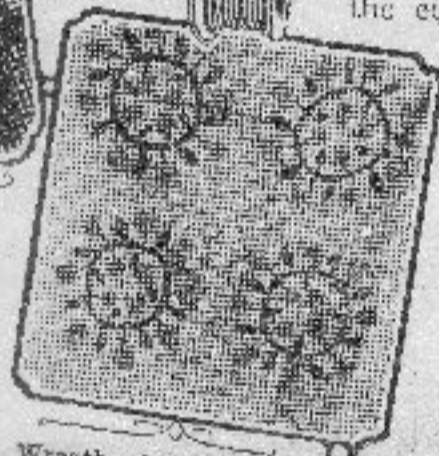
folding so tenderly on the bed, I had my first vision of heirlooms that money cannot buy.

They had been pieced, she said, many years before the war, and most of the "print" cost fifty cents a yard. The same material sells to-day for five cents a yard. That is, the same in texture, but never the same in pattern.

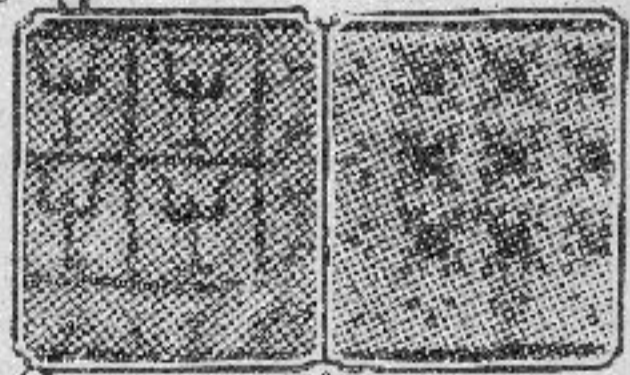
The modern department stores may boast of their wide assortment of fabrics, but they have not an inch of old-fashioned quilt calico. Few to-day remember that calico, with its yellow and greens looking as if someone had run a steam roller over a bed of dandelions, and made that the pattern. Its pinks were pinker than any girl's cheeks dared to be, and its blues were blue beyond a shadow of doubt. There were no half-tones in those days. Red was red; and cerise, old rose, magenta and all the other modern off-spring of that shade were unknown. Purple was purple; and lavender, like the airship, was undreamed of. And this bright purple was patched beside the bright red, or the brave blue,



Tennessee's Pride



Wreath of Roses



Family Tree

Blue Blazes

and no one, in those days, shuddered at the color combinations. The gentle influence of time, and the equally effective, though not so gentle, influence of smoke, had softened these brilliant hues, making them less glaring to the modern eye. The quilts bore a fascination which no woman could resist.

The background was homespun linen, a product which lasts longer than the hands that make it. Many of the colors that appeared

in the gay patterns had been made from dyes made of roots dug up in the woods. The stitches in the quilting were infinitely small, and the patterns beautiful and intricate.

THE "shell," the "herring bone," the "palm-leaf fan," the "peacock feather" and the double "Irish chain" were favorites, and not one showed the shiftlessness of straight parallel lines. Every quilt evinced a greater pride than that, and I have learned in my study of the aristocracy of quilts, that the woman who made of this quilting anything but an artistic task was regarded among her neighbors as "downright trilling."

The patterns had been cut out of gay-colored prints or home-dyed linens, and

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patched on a background of homespun linen in its natural color. That is the difference between a patchwork quilt and a piecework quilt. In these modern times if a woman puts a patch on as those women did, it is called "applique work." But they called it patchwork, and did the work infinitely better than it is done to-day.

I learned, at the home of this brother and sister, and on succeeding visits to other homes in that State and in Kentucky and Tennessee, that the name of the design has little to do with the colors. The design called "Blue Blazes" I have seen in blue so deep it seemed like the heart of the summer sky, and in other homes I have seen the same pattern in purple, and in red. But no matter what the color, the name of the pattern remained the same.

"Tennessee's Pride" was the most difficult piece of needlework I have ever beheld. Yet every block was symmetrical; every little patch the exact counterpart of its neighbor, and even the stitches with which it had been patched onto the background numbered the same.

I asked my hostess if her quilts were for sale, and found that I had insulted her by so doing. I apologized in great humility, suggesting that my desire to purchase was due to my admiration. She said she was "right glad" I liked them, but there wasn't money enough in the State to buy them.

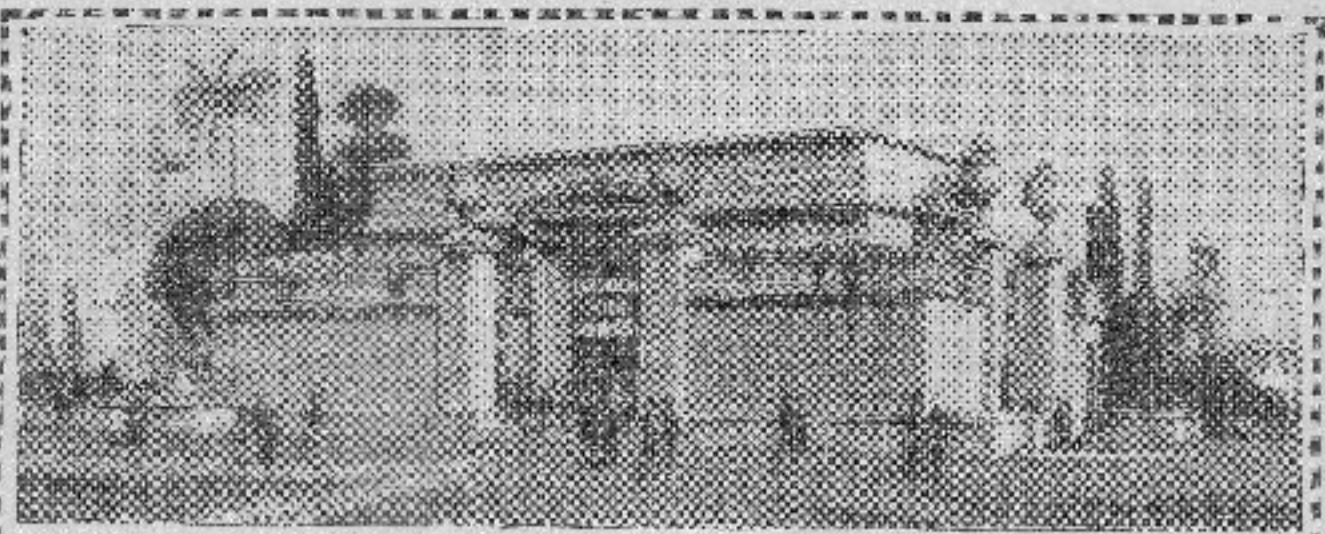
"But what will you do with them?" I asked, hoping she understood I was thinking she was without heirs, and that they would belong to strangers some day.

"When I know I'm a-goin' to die," she said, "I'll take these here quilts out in the yard and make a bonfire of them. No strangers are ever goin' to have what my mother and her mother put together with their own hands. I'm poor, but I'll never be so poor I'll sell 'em."

I found this same spirit prevailing wherever a home boasted of an old-time patchwork quilt. It might be lying in a fireplace closet where the smoke had free access to it, or it might be covering the children's trundle-bed; but wherever it was, or whatever might be its mission, it was never for sale.

YOU may think you are a friend of the family. Perhaps association and long acquaintance entitles you to that distinction, but if you try to buy one of these old-time quilts you find yourself classed as a "stranger," and hear in no uncertain tones that no "stranger" shall ever have "our family quilts." If you had asked to borrow the family monument out in the little private "burying ground" in a corner of the field, that you might take it home to crack nuts on, you would not have committed a more serious breach of good manners.

And so the dollar marches boldly to the ancient attics and tumbles spinning wheels and other heirlooms into the waiting van, but the dollar only gets its eyes full of smoke, and is thrust indignantly out when it ventures to usurp the place of an old-time, handmade quilt in Missouri, Kentucky or Tennessee.



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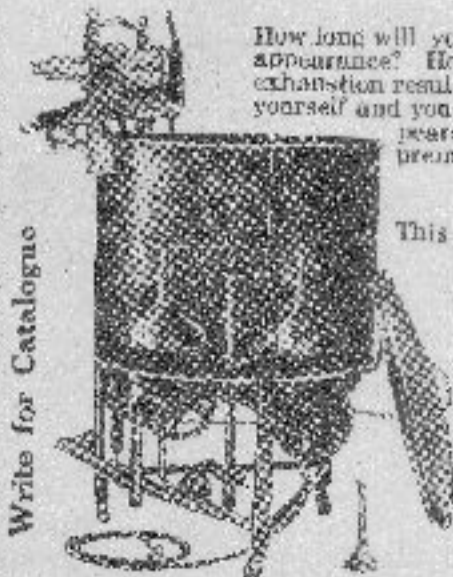
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