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Decorative Finishes

FOR HOME SEWING

EXTENSION CIRCULAR 465

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Decorative Finishes for Home Sewing

HELEN ROCKE

HOMEMAKERS who are seeking an outlet for their creative energy may many times direct this effort toward making the family clothing more attractive through the use of decorative finishes. The purpose of this circular is to present some principles to keep in mind when making plans for any needlework, and to give suggestions or directions for making a few decorative finishes to be applied to the costume. The girl or woman who acquires skill in making and applying decorative finishes will have the satisfaction of making something with her own hands that will add distinction and individuality to the clothing of her family at little cost.

RECOGNITION AND APPRECIATION OF GOOD DESIGN IN NEEDLEWORK

Needlecraft is an old art and many museums house priceless pieces and examples of the many kinds which have been developed through the years. Many families have some few pieces which they cherish among their priceless possessions. Such pieces of needlework are truly works of art. They give satisfaction to the creative spirit, just as painting and sculpture do. A knowledge of art and design has been required to make both.

Not every one can be a truly great artist nor aspire to make museum pieces, but every good homemaker desires to surround herself and her family with good standards of beauty. Family taste is in a large measure trained by objects of her selection and making. Recognition and appreciation of beauty and a feeling for the beautiful come through association with the beautiful. There is real need, then, for knowing and developing the fundamentals of good taste and good design in needlework. To be good design it need not be elaborate. Often the best design is very simple. We need to be able to recognize and enjoy good design. The thrift or economy that results from this ability is one which needs more emphasis. Articles of good design are lasting and one does not tire of them and soon desire to replace them.

Before investing material and time simply because we are interested in doing a piece of needlework, it is well to ask ourselves: (1) Do we really need the article? (2) Will it serve a definite purpose? (3) Does such an article need decoration? (4) Is the decoration we are planning appropriate?

Too often we see examples of the idea that an object must be decorated in order to be beautiful and too often the decoration is overdone. Some of the stamped pieces of needlework available through magazines, department stores, and needlework catalogs, such as dresser scarfs, luncheon sets, bed spreads, and pillow cases, fall into this classification. Unsuitable decoration means a loss of comfort, a sacrifice of beauty, and a waste of money. The true test of decorative design is that it should not appear to be added, but should be a part of the thing itself.

CHARACTERISTICS OF GOOD DESIGN

Design is any arrangement of lines, shapes, and colors. It is the selecting and arranging of materials with two aims—order and beauty. There are two kinds of design:

Structural—The design made by the size and shape of an object. Color and texture are also a part.

Decorative—The design used to enrich the beauty of an article.

There are definite standards or requirements for both kinds of design.

Good structural design.—If an object is intended for use these requirements are: (1) that it be suited to its purpose in addition to being beautiful, (2) that it be simple, (3) that it be well proportioned, and (4) that it be suited to the material from which it is made.

Good decorative design.—Such design should fulfill all the following, no matter whether intended for a costume, table runner, or a chair:

The decoration should be used in moderation.

The placing of the decorative design should help to strengthen the shape of the object.

The decoration should be placed at structural points.

There should be enough background space to give an effect of simplicity and dignity to the design.

Surface patterns should cover the surface in an orderly and harmonious arrangement.

The decoration should be suitable for the material and for the service it must give.

The real artist adapts or conventionalizes natural forms such as flowers, fruit, and birds to suit his materials and the shapes he wishes to decorate. He does not attempt to copy or imitate nature.

Since these principles of good design may be applied in all forms of needlework, they will help in planning and applying the decorative finishes for dresses, blouses, coats, and suits which are discussed in the following pages.

MACHINE STITCHING

Machine stitching with threads of different size and texture is an inexpensive trimming which often adds a professional touch to tailored garments. The beauty of machine stitching lies in the use of thread of contrasting or matching color and texture, in regulating the tension and length of stitch to suit the material, and in spacing the rows of stitching in even and regular arrangement.

Stitching with mercerized or silk sewing thread.—This is effective for collars and cuffs, belts, pockets, and pleats along the front opening of dresses and blouses. The wide side of the presser foot may be used as a gauge for spacing the rows of stitching.

One must plan so that the bands, pockets, or belts to be stitched are the right width for the number of rows of stitching to be made. Pin carefully

in position first and then baste along the edges and through the center, spacing the basting so that it will not be necessary to stitch through it.

Stitching with pearl cotton, embroidery floss, or similar thread.—Such stitching is often used on fabrics of plain color, making an all-over pattern for yokes, fronts of blouses, and jackets. The stitching is done before the garment is sewn together. Number 5 pearl cotton or rope embroidery floss is suitable for heavier fabrics such as linen, suiting, flannel, and other materials of equal weight. Wind the floss on the bobbin and use regular mercerized thread on the top of the machine. It may be necessary to lengthen the stitch and slightly loosen the bobbin tension.

Effective designs may be made by rows of diagonal stitching placed about an inch apart, or by making two or three straight rows of stitching close together and spacing them at regular intervals. Mark the pattern or design on the wrong side of the material. If the fabric is inclined to stretch, or is cut on the bias, baste to thin paper with diagonal basting. Stitch through the paper and remove paper and bastings when the stitching is completed.

Heavy-duty mercerized thread or special trimming thread may be used for this type of decorative stitching. These are used in the regular way but with a heavier needle than for ordinary sewing.

Elastic thread of the finer, lighter-weight quality is also used for decorative purposes. It may be used for a number of rows of shirring, or to shirr the entire front of a blouse or jacket. The elastic thread is wound on the bobbin without stretching, and mercerized thread is used on top, with the machine threaded in the regular way. The material is held flat and smooth and the elastic thread shirrs as it stitches. Ordinarily no adjustment in the tension is necessary unless the material does not shirr, or if the elastic thread sews into the fabric so tightly that it breaks when the shirring is pulled out straight. Then loosen the bobbin tension slightly.

TUCKS

Dainty tucks are an attractive trimming for blouses and dresses made of fabrics such as batiste, handkerchief linen, lawn, voile, organdie, and other sheer materials. With the exception of the wider plain and the corded tucks, those described are most effective on material without pattern or design.

Plain tucks are made interesting and decorative by variations in width and grouping. Tucks may be as fine as one-sixteenth of an inch. These may be grouped, or an entire surface such as a yoke or blouse front covered with them. Wider tucks may also be grouped so that there is interest and variety in the spacing as well as the tucks. The machine tucker is a time-saver if tucks are to be stitched by machine. A cardboard gauge helps in accurately measuring tucks made by hand. Such a gauge has two notches, the first notch to mark the exact width of one tuck and the second notch in line with the fold of the next tuck. This serves to keep the space between, as well as the tucks, even.

Scalloped or shell tucking is made by taking two stitches at even intervals over narrow hand-run tucks. These stitches are drawn close together to form scallops (Fig. 1).

Corded tucks are effective for taffeta, crepes, and other such materials. The cord may be basted inside the tuck and the stitching done by hand or

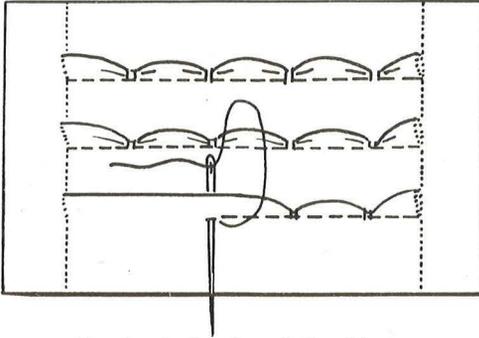


FIG. 1.—Scalloped or shell tucking.

machine (with a cording foot) if the tucks are not spaced too close together. If closely spaced, the cord is drawn in after the stitching is finished (Fig. 2).

Wider tucks held in place by a row of feather stitches or other simple stitches made with embroidery floss are an easily and quickly made decorative finish.

FASTENINGS

Decorative buttons may be the trimming needed to give distinction to a costume. Sometimes buttons are costly when purchased at the button counter, but there are a number which may be inexpensively made at home from material at hand. Crocheted buttons, fabric covered with rick-rack trim, and yarn buttons are examples.

Buttons made of pearl, glass, composition, or other such materials, which will not fade or be damaged by repeated washings, are best for

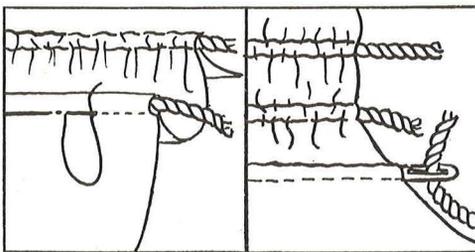


FIG. 2.—Corded tucks.

dresses and blouses which must be laundered often. Buttons made of wood, fabric covered or yarn embroidered, are better suited to dresses that will be dry cleaned.

Round crocheted buttons.—A wooden button mold or a large button may be used as a foundation. The single crochet

stitch is used and variation is gained through the combination of colors or flowers embroidered on the finished button. Wool yarn or various kinds of crochet thread may be used.

Make a chain of three stitches and join to form a ring. Fill with single crochet stitches. Break the yarn if the button is to be made of two colors. Then the next row may be made with another color of yarn if desired.

Additional stitches are used to make a flat circle. When the top of the mold is covered a single crochet stitch is taken in alternate stitches of the preceding row in order to cover the button mold snugly.

A plain crocheted button may be embroidered with five or six small flowerlike designs made in French knots or a single flower with a stem and a few leaves in lazy-daisy stitch.

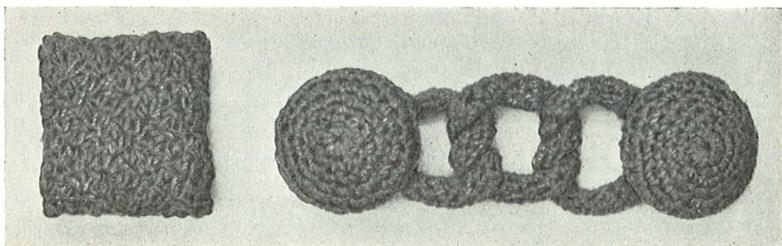


FIG. 3.—Crocheted buttons and links.

Square crocheted buttons.—Make a chain twice the length of the size desired for the finished button, turn. First row: sc in 2nd ch from hook * dc in next ch, sc in next ch, repeat from * across, ending with a dc, ch 1, turn. Second row: sc in each dc, and dc in each sc of previous row. Ch 1, turn. Repeat 2nd row until work is square. Break off. Fold over edges as illustrated in diagram, stuff with cotton, and sew edges together. Make thread loops on the back of these buttons for sewing them to the garment.

Yarn embroidered.—Bone or metal rings from 1 to 1½ inches in diameter are used as a foundation.

1. Thread a tapestry needle with colored yarn and blanket stitch over the ring, pulling the stitch toward the inside. The blanket stitch may be worked to the outside and the edge overwhipped in a contrasting color of yarn (Fig. 4-A).

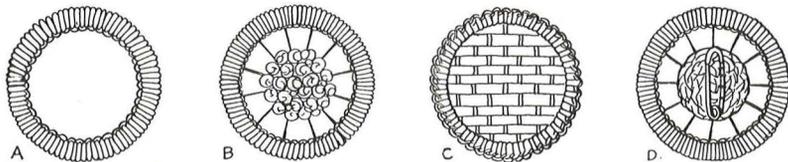


FIG. 4.—Yarn-embroidered buttons.

2. Run vertical lines of the wool to fill in the center space, catching the needle through the purl edge. In contrasting colors work in groups of French knots to form flowers in the extreme center or spread through the entire center (Fig. 4-B).

3. A plainer button may be made by weaving colored yarn across the center and omitting the flowers (Fig. 4-C).

4. Sew a safety pin at the back of the buttons for fastening to the garment (Fig. 4-D).

Covered buttons.—Discarded buttons or wooden button molds may be used. Cut two circles of plain material about three-fourths of an inch larger in diameter than the button so that three-eighths of an inch extends beyond the edge of the button. Thin wadding may be used to pad the top. Make a row of small stitches at the edge of the circle to be used for covering the top of the button. Machine stitching, using a long stitch, holds the material securely and evenly. Pull up the stitches so that the cloth covers the

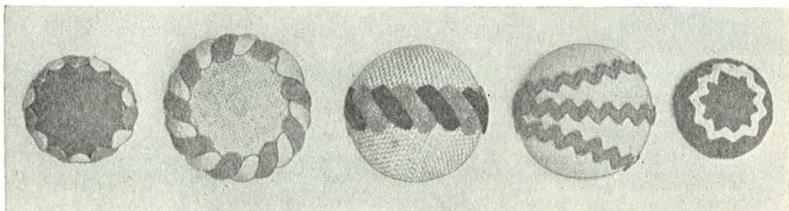


FIG. 5.—Buttons with rickrack trim.

button snugly. Turn under the raw edges of the other circle of cloth and sew to the underside of the button.

A row of rickrack may be placed between the two circles with only the points extending beyond the edge of the button. Other variations are indicated (Fig. 5). If rickrack is used on top of the button, a stitch is taken on each point and between points to hold it flat. Thread loops may be made on the back of any covered button for sewing them to the garment.

Linked buttons, covered with crochet or cloth may be used as fastenings for a belt as well as for other openings on a garment (Fig. 3). Make a cord of the same thread as used for crocheting the buttons as follows: Ch 2 and make 5 sc in 2nd ch from hook. For the 2nd and following rows: work round and round from the inside out, making sc in each sc of the previous round until the cord measures 11½ inches long. Tie in a loose square knot and sew the ends together with the same thread.

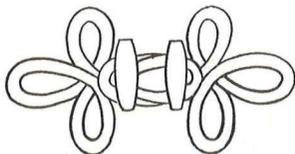


FIGURE 6.

Knots and loops.—Various knots and ornamental loops to be used as fastenings may be made from crocheted cord, braid, or fabric-covered cord (Fig. 6). To make a frog as shown in the illustration (Fig. 7), shape and pin or baste to wrapping paper, with seams toward you, if a fabric-covered cord is used. Fasten the cord securely at all crossings, being careful not to twist the cord. Remove from the paper and sew in position on the garment.

Thread loops are used with small buttons, thus providing a dainty fastening (Fig. 8). Finish the edges of the opening of the garment. Measure even distances on the edge of the opening to fit the buttons. Fasten the thread securely and make three foundation stitches. The thread

for the foundation stitches may be drawn over a pencil to keep the loops the same length. Cover the foundation stitches with close buttonhole stitches, using twist or heavy thread.

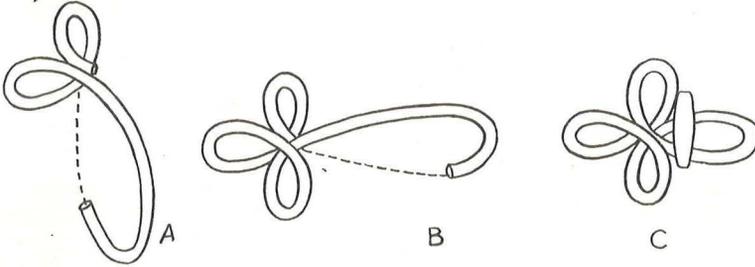


FIGURE 7.

Embroidered eyelets are used for studs or for removable buttons having a special shank. Mark the place for the eyelets with pencil dots, then outline each eyelet with small running stitches. Punch the center with a stiletto or the points of small scissors. Make a row of padding stitches and then finish the edge with close over-and-over stitches (Fig. 9). Buttonhole stitch may also be used.

A *corded buttonhole* is a variation of the bound buttonhole and is especially suitable for a fastening on a tailored dress or blouse.

1. Mark the place and length of buttonhole with basting. Cut two cords of medium cotton twine each one inch longer than the marking. Cover with bias or straight strips. Trim the raw edges of the covering to one-eighth of an inch.

2. Place cords on the right side of material with raw edges of covering next to the marked line. Stitch the length of the marked buttonhole.

3. Turn to wrong side and slash in the center between the stitched lines and then diagonally to the ends as shown.

4. Turn the cords through the slash to the

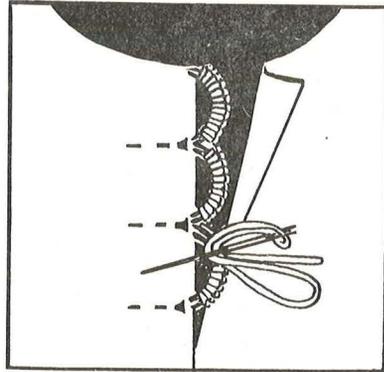


FIG. 8.—Thread loops.

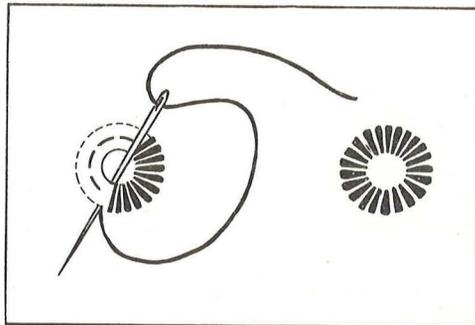


FIG. 9.—Embroidered eyelets.

wrong side. Stitch across the cords, sewing through the slashed triangles at ends of the buttonhole opening. Trim the ends of cords.

5. Slash the buttonhole opening in the facing of the garment, turn under raw edges, and slip stitch to the wrong side of the corded buttonhole (Fig. 10).

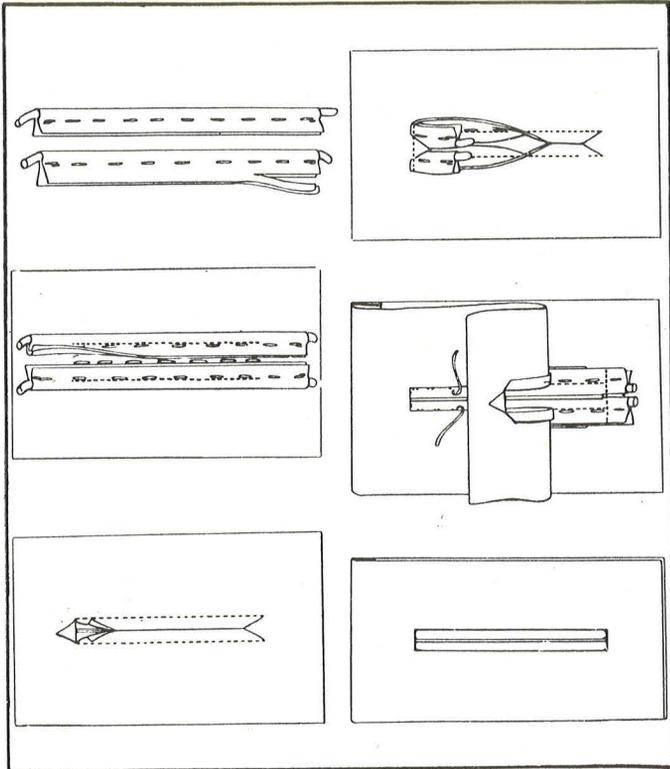
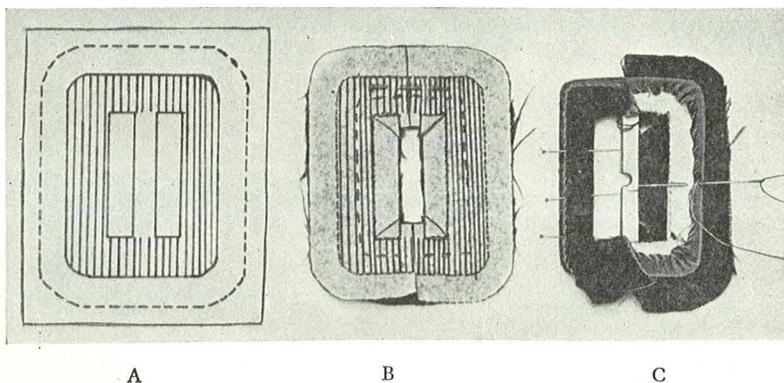


FIG. 10.—Corded buttonhole.

Buckles.—Many times self-colored belts are fastened with contrasting buckles that match buttons. Too often this draws the eye to the buckle as the dominant point in the costume. Covered buckles, ties, buttons, and various other means of fastening belts may be worked out to give more interesting effects. Directions for covering buckles with material like the dress or from which the belt is made follow (Fig. 11). If the buckle to be covered is not padded, it may be wound with soft yarn. This makes the covering wear better and helps in sewing it in place.

1. Trace the size of buckle on paper. Make seam allowance one-fourth of an inch (Fig. 11-A).

2. Baste the paper pattern to two thicknesses of material, having right sides together (Fig. 11-B).

FIG. 11.—Covering a buckle.¹

3. Stitch from bar to bar along the line marking center of buckle. Fasten threads securely at ends (Fig. 11-B).

4. Trim out the center of the material, leaving a one-fourth inch seam. Snip seam diagonally at corners. (If edges are circular, snip seam at one-fourth-inch intervals to permit turning.) Slash through one thickness from outer edge to center line with bar (Fig. 11-B).

5. Remove bastings and paper pattern. Turn material right side out. Fit it on the buckle, turning edge of right side to wrong side of buckle. Overcast edge of material in order to make it cup over edge. Stretch material tightly over right side of buckle and sew securely to wrong side. Turn edge of wrong side under and pin so that it will conceal any rough edges. Slip-stitch this edge securely (Fig. 11-C).

OTHER FINISHES

The arrowhead tack, crow's foot tack, and bar tack are decorative finishes used on tailored clothes to emphasize and reënforce structural points.

The *arrowhead tack* is used at the top of a pleat to hold a pleat in position or at points of darts. Button-hole twist is usually used for making the tack.

1. First mark on the cloth an equal-sided triangle with thread of contrasting color or chalk. Thread the needle with the twist and fasten by taking a few stitches from the center of the tri-

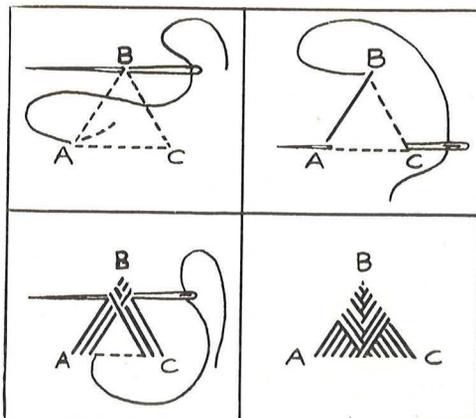


FIG. 12.—Arrowhead tack.

¹ Acknowledgment is given to Miss Carolyn Ruby of the Home Economics Department of the University of Nebraska for the directions for covering a buckle.

angle (as indicated in the illustration), bringing the thread out at the lower left-hand corner of the triangle (Fig. 12, point *A*).

2. Take a short stitch at the upper point (*B*), passing the needle through from right to left.

3. Insert the needle in the lower right-hand corner (point *C*) and bring it out on the line just to the right of *A*.

4. Continue in this way until the arrowhead is completed, making the stitches close together and always passing the needle from right to left. Insert the needle each time outside the thread marking the triangle. Fasten the thread from the wrong side.

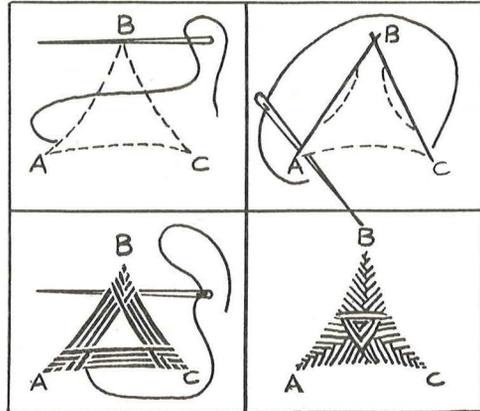


FIG. 13.—Crowfoot.

The *crowfoot and bar tacks* are often used at the corners of bound pockets. The position of the crowfoot tack is marked in the same way as described above. The thread is fastened and the needle brought out at the same point. A short stitch is taken at point *B* from right to left.

The second stitch is a short stitch at point *C*. The third stitch is a short stitch at *A*. Continue this process, making the stitches close together and following the outline of the crowfoot (Fig. 13).

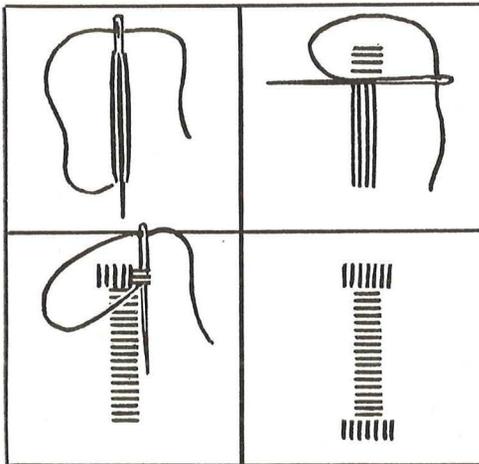


FIG. 14.—Bar tack.

The *bar tack* is made as follows: Make several stitches through the material across the end of the pocket or opening to be reinforced (Fig. 14). Work over the long stitches with short over-and-over stitches, always passing the needle through the material. Finish each end with a small bar tack, using the same method.