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# PLATTERS AND PIPKINS



# Platters and Pipkins

By  
MARY H. KROUT

“There’s pippins and cheese to come”  
— Merry Wives of Windsor

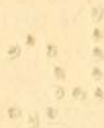


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DEDICATED TO  
ALL HOUSEKEEPERS:  
THE MANY WHO ARE STILL STRIVING  
AND THE FEW  
WHO HAVE BEEN PERFECTED  
THROUGH SUFFERING

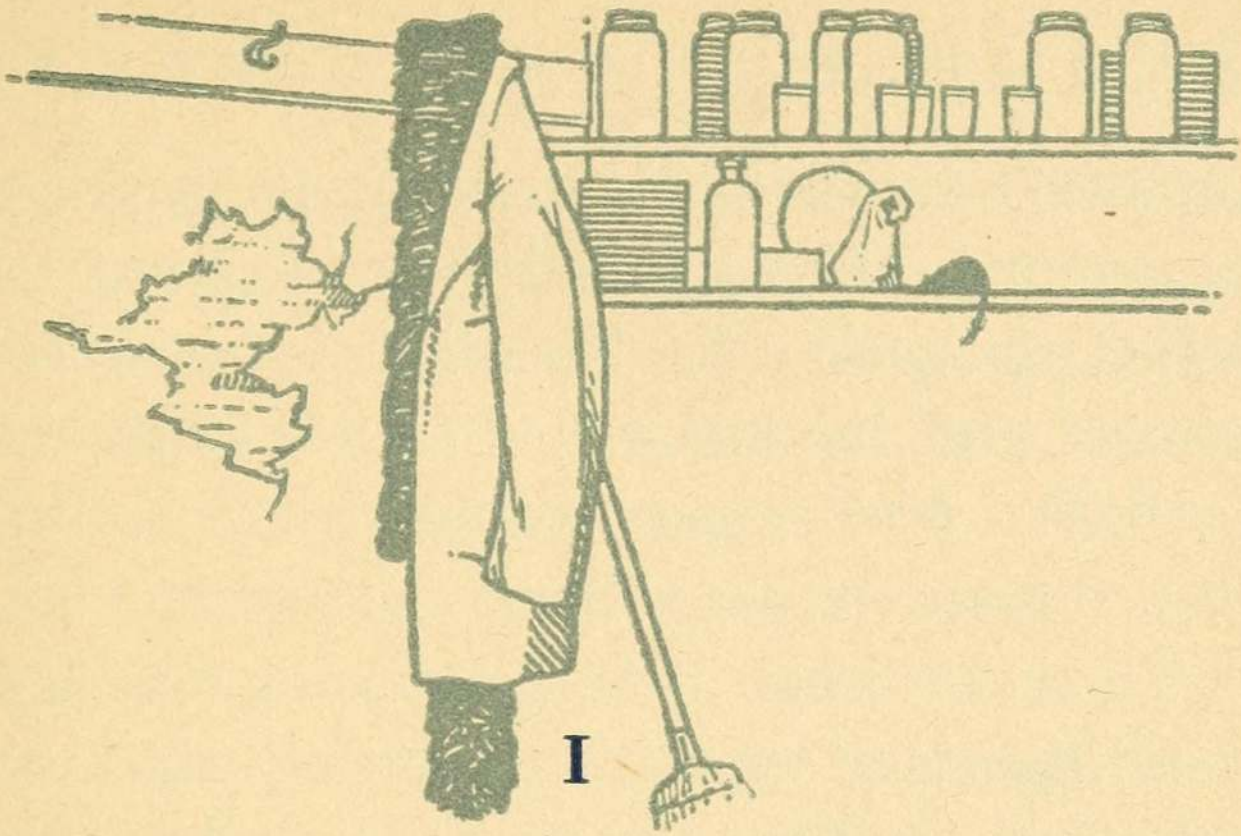




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## Matters in General

**T**HERE are houses and houses. Comfort and cleanliness are not indigenous to any special soil. They are, rather, like growth in grace — the outcome of struggle, of conflict and of eternal patience.

We all know that in the midst of life we are in death, and, in the ceaseless disintegration that goes on everywhere the house and its belongings are not spared. Moth and dust are busy with the clothing, curtains and rugs, while silent chemical agencies cease not, by day or night, proclaim-

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ing themselves in mould, fermentation and decay, apparent to the sight and to the sense of smell. What the cook calls "spoiling" is but a varied reminder of the temporary nature of all things earthly. Matter may be indestructible, but its transformations are without end and number.

There are some melancholy verses pasted in more than one woman's scrapbook which recite the woes of the despairing housekeeper who throughout her existence swept and dusted, and scrubbed, waging a life-long war against dirt. The conclusion of the whole matter was, that, overcome at last, she lay down and "was buried in dirt" — a tragical conclusion which must be accepted, notwithstanding Richard Grant White's strictures against the hateful word.

It is the inevitable end, of course, but it is not, after all, a cause for hopeless discouragement. Because one must work to-day, and to-morrow and the next day, doing pretty much the same things over and over again, it should not really dishearten one. The great mother of us all, Dame Nature herself, proceeds in the same round, on

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the same plan, and so furnishes the race an eternal example of perfect order and submission.

The leaves that swell and burst, and shake themselves free, under the skies of May, to find the sun shining, the birds singing, the soft south wind blowing, are doomed to wither and fall. Beyond the heavenly graciousness of spring, the fervid heat of midsummer, the frost is waiting to blight, and the snow to cover them. But what of it? They will come again and yet again, with unfailing verdancy from the secret places of creation.

Women are apt to rebel against what they call "the monotony of housework." But what work, well done, is not monotonous? The husband and father goes to his shop or office six days in the week, often the whole year round. He pores over his ledgers, contends with stupid and idle employees, and has a thousand vexations which he knows are inseparable from the business he has chosen. Between the sins of the slatternly maid in the kitchen, and the blunders of clerks or workmen, that may involve the loss of thous-

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ands of dollars, there is certainly not much choice.

The only wisdom is not to expect perfection — an unattainable state that no human being has yet achieved.

When Euphemia kindles the kitchen fire with gasoline — with disastrous consequences — one must reflect that, if she knew better, she would not be in the kitchen at all, but in a “nate house of her own,” or perhaps on your calling list. To put one’s expectations on “a low plane” — to use one of the trite expressions of the hour — is alike to be prepared for disappointment, should it come, or for joyful and ecstatic surprise if it doesn’t.

“Think on your marcies,” as Uncle Tom counseled, in his beautiful faith in the Giver of all good gifts. If the biscuits are heavy, be thankful that they are not poisonous; if your second best muslin has been faded to a sickly grey by one of those perfectly harmless washing powders, be thankful that you still have a first best that you can, in an emergency, “do up” your-

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self, or send to the cleaner — one of course whom you know well. This method, resolutely adopted and followed, will develop philosophic endurance, if not a cheerfulness, passing that of Mark Tapley, in all but the hopelessly dyspeptic or the victims of hereditary melancholia.

In the midst of much mending, patching, darning and altering, the minds of the orthodox turn wistfully to the imperishable garments of the children of Israel sojourning in the wilderness. No wonder that then and there was developed a superior type — “Mothers in Israel” — who have been a synonym to this day, for all the high virtues of exceeding godliness.

But, reflect upon their opportunities! Those simple and indestructible garments which nothing could soil, or tear, or mar in any way! For forty years the fashions never changed. The sleeves, full at the top and tight at the wrist one season, did not maliciously and perversely reverse themselves the next, and if they were buttoned it was with buttons that never came off; or, if tied, with strings that never broke. This

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one department of household economics, to use another word in high favor just now, left hours for devotion and meditation, under circumstances that tended to soothe the most irritable nerves and the most perturbed spirit.

But the blessings of the Chosen Ones did not end there, for, with the entire elimination of the clothes problem, they knew nothing of houses with modern improvements, and, for a time, at least, manna was rained down from Heaven, only to be gathered, fresh and satisfying, every morning. There were no struggles with brands of poor flour and adulterated baking-powder, no by-products of coal-tar, no glucose, no cottonseed oil, or health foods; nor were the days of high teas, ceremonious luncheons or the ten course dinner even prophesied, though that was the dawn of a prophetic age.

When one reflects upon all this, one is amazed that the Mothers in Israel — the only women of leisure that ever lived — did not set their faces stubbornly against further emigration. No Promised Land could have offered them half the



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opportunities for high thinking and serene character building that they found there in what has passed into history — and very mistakenly — as the wilderness.

The Promised Land, once reached, meant for their lords, who apparently had not yet become their masters, endless warfare with tribes whose names alone constitute entire lessons in the morning service from time to time during the ecclesiastical year; and for themselves living in houses with all that appertains thereto.

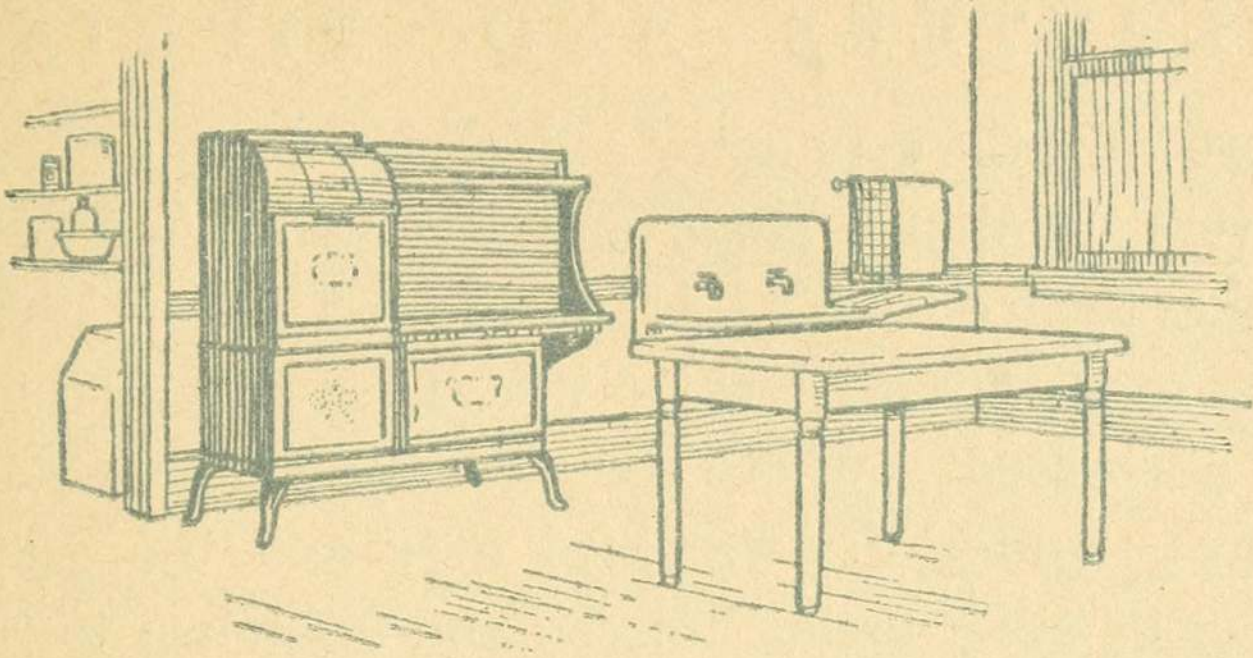
With their indestructible clothes and an un-failing supply of manna, they might have established an ideal civilization in the wilderness based upon perfect equality — a spiritual and intellectual communism beyond all imagining.

They did not; hence the combined ills and occupations that have descended to the present generation. Upon the whole, however, these descendants have not acquitted themselves so badly when one bears in mind the steady increase of obstacles to the simple life which we are all discussing a great deal and avoiding as much as possible.

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Indeed, I am reminded in this connection of a good old clergyman of the primitive Baptist Church who used to combine lecturing on temperance with his sermonizing. He was addressing a drowsy audience one hot August afternoon in the village court-house. Frightful examples of the effects of intemperance were cited and endless facts and figures poured into the dulled ears of his hearers. Last of all, he said:

“Those present who wish to do so may now sign the pledge. The females need not sign. The females are doing as well as they know how.”



## II

# About Kitchens

**T**HE kitchen is like the powerhouse of an electric railway. The comfortable cars fly fast as the wind over the smooth rails. The passenger sits in his cushioned seat, reads his paper, or looks out of the window at the changing landscape. He sees the varied life of town and village, the cattle in the fields, the orchards pink with blossoms, or the boughs hung with fruit surpassing in brilliancy the jewelled trees of Aladdin's adventure. The motorman keeps his eye fixed on the track be-

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fore him; the conductor collects the fares and answers questions, stops and lets people off and takes them on. All this time, far off, out of sight, the great wheels revolve where the potent force is generated — where the elements do not interfere — under the watchful eyes and the guidance of other hands, unseen and unknown to the traveller.

The kitchen fire is really the motive power of the whole domestic machinery, and the presiding genius that regulates it is a sort of culinary engineer.

There are lazy women who profess superiority to nourishment for the body. If left to themselves, they browse off the pantry shelves, as Wordsworth and his helpmeet are said to have done, taking what they find, "because it is too much trouble to set the table and cook for one." These are the sad and erring patrons of restaurants who lunch on ice cream and lemon pie, and dine on nothing but entrées, few in number, but potent in the promotion of indigestion.

I have in mind a writer on a western news-

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paper, hard-worked and not wealthy. She did what is called "light housekeeping," in two small rooms — that is, she prepared her own breakfasts and luncheons. Now, as she was a newspaper writer — or simply a woman writer, for that matter — it will be at once assumed that she could not cook or keep house — "light," or otherwise. The opinion is one of those stubborn, lingering fallacies like the unreliable proverbs which Charles Lamb has dissected, though not yet likewise disproved.

In reality, this woman was highly skilled, to such a degree that if she had been a theosophist — which she was not — she would have chosen in her next incarnation to be a cook, and leave the typewriter and fountain pen to those who had æons of punishment to undergo for their sins. Her napery was of the finest; her china and silver shone with much polishing, and to the breakfast of fruit, coffee, rolls and chops, a queen might have been asked any day in the week. What she had, though simple, was of the best and beautifully served, and in that spotless sit-

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ting-room, when the table was cleared, there never was the faintest smell or suggestion of cooking. She had a closed cabinet for her dishes, utensils which were light and few in number, a covered shelf at the back window for butter, milk, and fruit in mild weather, and the use of the refrigerator in the basement. She was a walking advertisement of good living—sound digestion and healthy nerves.

She said, "I had but one catastrophe in the whole three years — and that, of course, was when I was expecting friends to lunch. At the very last moment the coffee pot fell from the gas jet into the upper bureau drawer, which I had opened and forgotten to close. But that was nothing of consequence. I made fresh coffee and shut the drawer until I could set it to rights, after the visitors left."

This illustrates the fact that even in two-room housekeeping there must be some semblance of a kitchen, though it may not be recognized as such.

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In the old days, in old-fashioned houses, the kitchen was the favorite family rendezvous.

“Where’s mother?” was the first query of husband and sons, and without waiting the answer they straightway sought the kitchen and there they found her. And she was never bothered by their incursions. Nervous prostration was at that time unknown.

I remember what might have been an embarrassing situation had it not been frankly and squarely met. A young lawyer asked permission, which was granted, to call upon a young woman of his acquaintance and bring with him a friend — a dignitary of the state Supreme Court. It was early in October, and the stoves were not up — for that was long before the days of the prosaic but convenient steam coil. Suddenly it turned very cold. The man hurriedly engaged to put up the parlor stove did not arrive until six p. m. When it was moved in from the barn and heaved into position it was found that the pipe had one of those strange attacks of swelling

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that occur during summer storage, and it would not and could not be made to fit.

By that time the shops were closed and the callers were to arrive at eight. There were but two alternatives: the callers could be received in the icy parlor, there to shiver and catch possibly fatal pneumonia; or, they could have the privilege of sitting by a comfortable fire in — the kitchen!

Which should it be? After calm reflection, false pride was cast to the winds, the sanctity of the Supreme Court was resolutely disregarded. What was a judge anyway — except in rare instances — but a man? When the visitors arrived the situation was explained. They accepted it like gentlemen, as they were, and both being charming and interesting talkers, the time passed swiftly. I am forced to acknowledge that it was a very superior sort of a kitchen. It was carpeted with a pretty rag carpet of the kind now considered very high art, the table was covered with a bright crimson cloth; there were nice shades and fresh muslin curtains, and a collec-



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tion of thrifty geraniums in full bloom on the window sill. One of those capacious modern receptacles that might be anything, held and hid all the cooking supplies and paraphernalia. The stove was brilliantly polished, and beside it were drawn up three comfortable chairs. The clock ticked cheerfully, and near at hand was the pantry from which, at the psychological moment, were brought forth satisfying things to eat and drink. As a social function, the evening was an entire success, which the novel surroundings appeared only to enhance.

Our English cousins have a pleasant fashion of "showing you the house," once you have been asked across its threshold. You are personally conducted through drawing-rooms, library, reception rooms, and even bedchambers, and they never think of leaving out the kitchen.

"Would you like to peep into the kitchen and see the cook making bread?" asked a hospitable matron who, in her shiny black silk dress and high lace cap, lacked only the mediæval cuirass

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and sword, to have posed for Britannia ruling the waves.

I have another English kitchen in mind — a sweet place in Kent — “homely,” a British subject would have called it. There was a stone-flagged floor, with stout beams of age-blackened oak overhead, and many kinds of burnished copper vessels were ranged along the walls. Here, after a long walk across the twilight fields to hear the nightingales sing in the copses, we gathered about the well scoured table to refresh ourselves with a truly English ten o’clock supper of bread and butter, cheese, brawn and salad. To the American guest, the clock of time had stopped. Her native land had only just been discovered; telephones and telegraphs, air ships and motor cars were questionable blessings and undreamed of. Had the host begun to talk in the vernacular of Pepys and Evelyn, she would not have been surprised. But what American would have invited an unfamiliar guest to supper at a deal table in the kitchen, in that unaffected and truly hospitable fashion? It must be confessed, how-

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ever, in extenuation, that few or none of us have such kitchens. Ours are never so dignified and massively simple, invaded as they have been by all manner of balking, labor-saving inventions — doubtful improvements in a disguise that they will never shed — around which the plumber and the electrician hover perpetually.

Much of the work to which the kitchen was once devoted is now done elsewhere. The coffee is ground at the grocer's, and the morning slumbers of those who occupy the back bedchambers are not disturbed by the reassuring rattle of the coffee-mill.

Linoleum is warmer and easier to clean than bare boards, and deadens Euphemia's elephantine tread — Euphemia who has sniffed at and rejected with scorn the sound-proof felt slippers provided her gratuitously by a generous mistress.

The cabinets which have been mentioned, and which really are not lightly to be rejected, remind one, nevertheless, of folding beds. The pot closet is decorously veiled; there are pictures and illuminated calendars with a correct domestic

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sentiment for every day in the year; and there are little recesses curtained with art chintz for the dish, that never again, in this age of suppressed imagination, will run away with the spoon.

The water is "laid on" as the English say, though why, no one knows, and a turn of the nickel-plated faucet in the sink lets forth a clear stream which one is admonished by the Board of Health to boil carefully before drinking, as a precaution against typhoid germs.

Some of the inventions are really a saving of backs, without which the woman's club would not be possible. But it is among the unsolvable problems that with the multiplication of patent contrivances our domestic burdens apparently increase, and we have less leisure than ever.

The contented soul that pieced "Rising Sun" patchwork quilts, did all the family sewing by hand, and spun and wove the household flannel and bleached the family linen, has vanished with long-legged spiders and warming-pans, cakes made with seventeen eggs — whites and yolks beaten separately — and funeral invitations.

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But, to return to the original proposition, the kitchen fire is really the motive power of the whole domestic machinery. With that fire out, the whole household mechanism comes to a standstill. Three good, plain, wholesome meals a day, which must be produced from its stores and appliances, are necessary to the well-being of the whole family, to the mother, herself; to the father, harassed by many business cares; to the children, driven to the limit of their strength in the frantic rivalry to "make credits" and pass grades.

And, though Euphemia may strike, or be disabled with some sudden and acute ailment, the situation need not become desperate. Family cooperation can be secured with a little firmness; simple diet may be prescribed. The practicable rule observed of "washing up as you go," putting everything back in its place when it has been used and is no longer needed, will, of itself, rob the kitchen of half its terrors and restore at least a part of its old pleasantness.



### III

## The Pains and Pleasures of Dish-washing

**O**NE of the mixed troubles of my childhood is the recollection of standing on what was known as “the flat-bottomed chair,” in one of the familiar crises — just after the last maid-of-all-work had departed and her successor had not yet arrived. The standing was not in the nature of discipline, but because I was short of stature and the table was tall and covered with dishes to be washed — oh, so many, many of them, ranging all the way from the glasses, which to the indiscriminating

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mind of childhood it was a work of supererogation to dip into water again, to the spoons — and everybody used so many — the plates, the platters and the heavy vegetable dishes coated with a hard, grey, “goose-flesh,” down to the coarse cooking vessels.

But my dissatisfaction was chiefly because I was a feeble, ailing child; furthermore, being of an imaginative and inventive turn, at the time the dishes were to be washed I always wanted to do something else. I recall having successfully relieved the tedium of rocking the baby by drawing the cradle up to the open door — in the absence of the family, of course — tying the clothes line to it, then descending the steep back steps, carrying the line with me to the farthest limits of the side yard, and from this safe distance, with the protests of the baby materially diminished, rocking it jerkily under the pleasant shade of an apple tree. A jerk too much upset the cradle and the baby rolled out, luckily unhurt, which ended the experiment abruptly. But

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while it lasted it had all the excitement of novelty and the enjoyment of uncertainty.

We were musically inclined, I and the younger sister who “wiped,” while I “washed,” and we endeavored to throw a glamour over our task by rendering selections from a long repertoire—ballads, hymns, national airs, and what were then known as “Sunday School songs.” These, at that period, were peculiarly gloomy, chiefly reminders in verse of sudden and untimely death. The singing was loud—there were no pianissimo passages, even in the most funereal of the Sunday school songs, as we interpreted them. We sang energetically and we unconsciously kept time to the measure, especially in those passages marked *ritardando* on the score, holding dish-cloth and tea-towel immovable at the whole notes and dotted half notes. By this arrangement we prolonged the dish-washing out of all reason.

Once the grandmother, of beloved memory, came for a visit—her sweet voice sounding in my ears, and her gentle, benign face rising out of the long, long vanished past as I write. In the



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midst of one of our customary duets over the dish-pan she appeared at the kitchen door and said: "Children, you sing beautifully, but suppose you finish your work first and see how quickly you can do it. Then, you can have all the afternoon for singing."

We looked at each other astonished. It was a brilliant, new idea that had never occurred to us. We put the suggestion into immediate practice, and the dishes were washed, wiped and put away in a jiffy.

But — we did not then care to sing — nor did we, ever again — "over the teacups." We discovered that expedition was better than music on such occasions, and we profited by the grandmother's gentle hint.

There is, perhaps, nothing about the work of the house which the average woman dislikes so much as dish-washing. There are few who do not object to it, and still fewer who say that they actually like it. They are seldom believed — like the people who insist that they love Wagner and Browning, and yet want professional expla-

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nation to make all their hidden meanings clear.

It assuredly is a part of housekeeping at which mere man, left to himself for a time — on his camping expeditions, or while his wife is visiting her family — boggles disgracefully. The sticky dishes and dingy glass usually speak for themselves. Occasionally, however, the guilty one confesses how he managed it, and with the arrogance of his sex, even recommends his method over that brought to perfection by the wisdom of the feminine mind, from time immemorial.

If at home, his suggestion is, paper — wrapping paper preferred, but if that is not obtainable, then newspapers, and that, too, in this degenerate age when they run to full-page illustrations that are largely smears of printer's ink.

If camping, his method is to use sand, swiping the things round and round, with a brisk polishing off by way of a *coup de main*. So firm is the operator in the belief that this is the true and only way, that, in addition to discoursing at length on dish-washing made easy, he can hardly be restrained from putting a cart-load of sand

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into the cellar with the winter coal. But there are others — of the same superior sex — who frankly acknowledge their total inability to cope with the dish-washing problem. Not many, of course, but a few, frank, fearless, honest souls who stand out in bright refulgence, have admitted that their powers have limitations. I once saw indications of such a spirit, and indications only, as is usually the case among those who deal even on terms of familiarity with spirits.

It was in far-off Australia. We came upon reminders of an abandoned camp, beside a stream under a eucalyptus tree. There were traces of extinguished fire where the “billy” had been boiled, empty and rusting “tins” of many dimensions, blackened and battered cooking vessels and broken dishes. It resembled a battle ground after a hard fight. But the vanquished ones were not ashamed of their defeat; they manfully — or unmanfully — acknowledged it, for they had left nailed up against the tree a board whereon was inscribed, plainly and legibly, this legend: “Wanted: A General.”

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A "general" did not in this context mean a commanding officer to reorganize the demoralized forces. It is the antipodean term for maid-of-all-work.

The woman of some sorrows and many vexations knows well that the devices enumerated above are in reality faulty inventions of minds rebelling, for the moment, against their environments. She is satisfied that the sink — if it has been constructed for a woman below the proportions of a lady of Brobdingnag — an ample pan, a long-handled mop, a nice and saving soap-shaker, are the indispensable accompaniments of good dish-washing — and, of course, *plenty* of scalding hot water. It is the instinct of man to simplify everything but technical phraseology. This he clings to with the tenacity of an unconquerable will; because, like the mystery that enshrouded the Delphic oracle, it helps him keep the upper hand with the masses, deluding them into the belief that, after all, there may be something in it, and filling them with an unreasoning admiration for a mind that is not unbalanced by so

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much vain repetition. Hence the sand-and-newspaper dish "cleaning."

I frankly confess that I am one of the few women who love Wagner and Browning and have no antipathy to dish-washing. Not that I love it; but there is a real satisfaction in removing the chaos of an abandoned dinner-table, carrying the dishes away and "scraping" them in the kitchen or butler's pantry, for cooks quit, even in houses that have a butler's pantry — and arranging them in order for purification. Polished glass, shining silver, glossy and burnished plates upon whose surface not even the sensitive fingers of a blind man could discover the slightest semblance of roughness, all set forth in chaste and spotless groups, fill my soul with satisfaction not untinged by pride. Even the potato masher, so slippery and sticky, and the big, dull lid of the stew-pan that has lost its brightness through age — like folks — I can contemplate with serene approval after their cleansing, though I am free to admit that it is the kind of approval one feels who has done one of those trying stints

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that can be classified as duty — such as paying a visit to a dull, censorious neighbor, or bearing patiently with a man who sniffs.

The whole secret of successful and not disagreeable dish-washing is that imparted by the shrewd old grandmother so long ago — expedition, combined with thoroughness; next to that, the right sort of getting ready. There are weak and self-indulgent persons who “pile up” a whole day’s dishes and leave them until the next morning. They love to sit around the table, the meal ended, and gossip; or, after breakfast, slip away to “glance over the morning paper” before the library fire — an occupation which means reading it all, carefully, to the last bargain advertisement and the last sentence of the driest editorial. But all this immoral and shiftless procrastination brings its own punishment. All the while one is gossiping, no matter how congenially, the eye wanders over the waiting dishes; and during the narrative of battle, murder and sudden death, not forgetting the divorces, now recognized as the only legitimate “news,” there is still

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a subconscious realization that the dishes are still waiting and will never betake themselves to the kitchen without human intervention. The "controls" of even the most advanced spiritual mediums seem to do nothing more than raise heavy tables from the floor, which is not of the slightest practical use to anybody. When they so far develop as to send the dishes to the kitchen sink and back again, ready for future use, there will be an immediate accession to the ranks of earnest inquirers, followed no doubt by many sound conversions. But, as the young sophomore orator would remark — "that time is not yet."

The only method that is both sure and certain is to rise at once; seize the dishes firmly and remove them, no matter how much you may want to know what happened to Ellen Jones *then*, or who was elected President of the Mothers' Congress on the last ballot. Place glass and silver scrupulously to themselves, neither chipping the one by piling it together, nor dinting and bending the other under the soup plates or heavy chop platter; then arrange cups, saucers, small dishes

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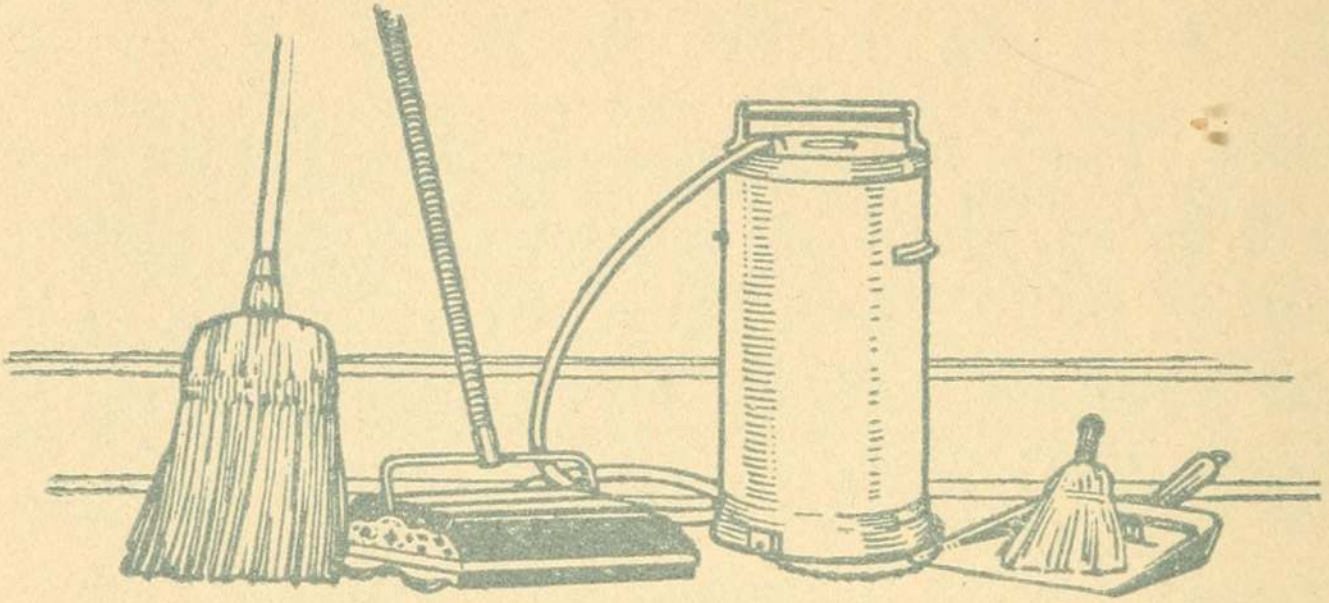
and plates in proper order. The true dish-washer stands self-confessed in these nice preliminaries. If silver, glass and china are scattered about, higgledy-piggledy; if the plates are not freed from every trace of food than can be removed by conscientious scraping, then one knows what to expect — dish-washing degraded to the merest savage rite. A glance at the dish-pan reveals there a mixture — “thick and slab” — as that brewed by the witches in Macbeth. The tea-towels are also eloquent witnesses and, like the mistress’s pocket handkerchiefs, if possible, should be many, fine, and white as snow. And this, too, is achieved only by willing hands, plenty of soap and hot water without limit.

When the rule given is followed scrupulously, like the musical diversion I have described, the interest in Ellen Jones and the doings of the Mothers’ Congress will, possibly, have quite evaporated, but how pleasant the kitchen looks! So pleasant that, for the moment, you forget that the same process must be repeated to-morrow, and through all the to-morrows, for years to



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come. For it will not be in our time that the race will be sustained on concentrated food pellets, carried in the glove, like a street car fare, or in the waistcoat pocket — an evolution destined to banish the kitchen and all that therein is.



#### IV

## Sweeping—Past and Present



WHO can explain the dismalness of dust? It is an implied reminder — never welcome except in prolonged sea-sickness, or face-ache — of the final end of all mortality; of the most depressing and least uplifting texts in the Bible, and the sadness of the burial service.

The relation between ideas and their obscure origin is so subtle that psychology devotes many abstruse chapters to this one theme alone. At any rate, dust is undeniably the outward and visible sign of neglect and decay.

## SWEEPING — PAST AND PRESENT

It is terribly depressing to come home from a holiday, spent in the clean forest, or at the still more cleanly sea-shore, before Euphemia has arrived to set the house in order and wind the clocks.

The dust that has gathered on the window-sills, on the piano and the banisters, is so very dusty — so much greyer and grittier than that which settles down from day to day, and which is from day to day removed. It mournfully indicates that the holidays are over, with all their lounging and sailing, hammocks and novels, and that, with the broom and the dust-pan again to the fore, the serious business of life begins once more — getting the children into school, the fall sewing, the revival of the club and the missionary society, and the ordering of three meals daily.

There is nothing for it but to face the dust-pan boldly and be sure that the new broom sweeps clean.

It is remarkable what a deal there is about brooms in folk-lore and literature. The mischief-making witch of our beloved old fairy tales could

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mount her broomstick and whisk herself out of danger in the twinkling of an eye. The old woman who swept the cobwebs out of the sky must have been a benefactress in her time—a vast improvement on some municipal street sweeping that could be mentioned. The broom came up many times in the Salem trials, while those of Joe and the Marchioness are still dear to the few and dwindling readers of Dickens.

Sang Puck in the revels of “A Midsummer Night’s Dream”:

“Not a mouse  
Shall disturb this hallowed house;  
I am sent with broom before  
To sweep the dust behind the door.”

The construction of the last clause in the above quotation should commend itself to the many classes that spend long hours in clearing up literary obscurity for the less intelligent readers; it would lend itself most suggestively to debate as to whether the “tricksy sprite” had been sent to sweep the dust *behind* the door, after Euphemia’s manner, when she is in a hurry, or *from behind*

## SWEEPING — PAST AND PRESENT

the door, where she has absent-mindedly left it.

There are clean, conservative souls who regard the patent sweeper with loathing. They are the severely thorough who still rigorously fell all seams that ought to be felled; who despise all easy ways of doing things and who will reach Heaven, at last, only by the narrowest path of all, because they prefer it. Their brooms, singly and collectively, are a credit to them. They never shed straws, or run to a sharp peak, like an index finger pointing skyward on an old-fashioned tombstone. A string is run through a hole in the handle of each broom, and by this it is hung on its own nail, when it does not stand, as a respectable broom should, reversed in its proper place behind the pantry door. And it is washed — roundly scrubbed — with soap and water, like a submissive child. Then, no matter how stubby — *evenly* stubby — it becomes from long use, it is never soiled — not even the last remnant that is finally committed to the furnace.

The well kept broom is as efficacious as it is what the country newspapers call “nice-appear-

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ing.” There is no corner that it does not find — under the bed, under the bureau, along the baseboard — and where it has gone a West Point inspector might pass his white-gloved fingers and find them still immaculate.

Hardwood floors have certainly simplified the business of sweeping, though the removing and beating of rugs could hardly be recommended as light and easy employment for decayed gentlewomen. The great compensation is, that when rugs have been carried out of doors and well beaten the house is really clean. Microbes have been carried away bodily — if they do not float back through the open windows — your neighbors’, or your own.

It is too much to hope, with a people so fond of change as are Americans, that the fashion of rugs and polished floors will remain. But, we can make the most of it while it lasts; rejoice that, through its agency, the most malignant feature of house-cleaning has been held, for a time, in abeyance, and that the art of darning holes with carpet ravellings bids fair to become as obsolete as sampler marking.

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But there are still many carpeted floors, and these yet demand the ministration of the broom or carpet sweeper. It will be some time before the vacuum cleaner will come into universal use.

The charges brought against the carpet sweeper are fairly well sustained. I have seen rooms and furniture so battered and beaten by it that one might almost imagine that a herd of hard-hoofed quadrupeds had been turned loose in and amongst them, there to gambol at will.

When Euphemia is not watched, she likes to throw open the windows, tie the curtains in hard knots, and sweep amongst the furniture like some large, square craft navigating an intricate archipelago. Her guiding principle is to sweep around, and by no means move, things. In this exercise she raises clouds of dust that collect again on walls, ceilings and cornice, like a lasting haze, the obscurity increasing with the length of her term of service.

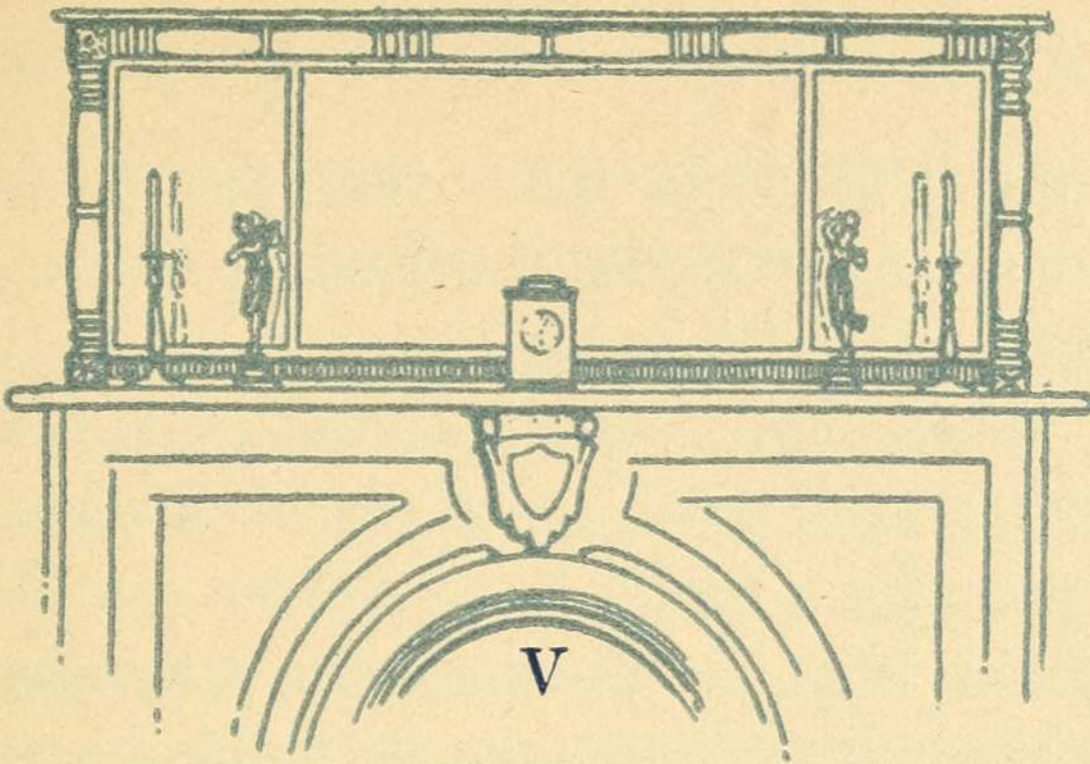
Of course, no intelligent woman need be told that every chair and table should be wiped, polished and removed, the mantel cleared and the

## PLATTERS AND PIPKINS

pictures covered. Then the carpet — if there is one — should first be sprinkled with damp tea leaves or bits of damp paper, and brushed firmly and thoroughly with a clean, solid broom. In some houses even this careful method is tabooed, and carpets, or matting, are wiped with soft cloths. But while the English housemaid will still creep about obediently, on hands and knees, with her big, inconvenient brush that wakes you at daybreak, whacking the banisters as she “does” the stairs, there is something in the free air of the Republic that raises the opposition of her sister, American or naturalized. *She* demands a broom, or gives notice, and she usually gets the broom.

As in the kitchen, when the dishes are washed and put away, so, after the weekly sweeping there is a temporary brightness that one wishes might last; fresh flowers in the vases, a new lustre on the bric-a-brac, and the fragrance of pure, cool air that has blown through the house. Cleanliness is “akin to godliness,” and this should be the special text for sweeping day.





## Some Reflections About Dusting

**A**S to the respective merits of dust-cloths and brushes, competent authorities differ as irreconcilably as they do over the many ways of making coffee and washing flannels. The advocate of the feather-duster, who is the natural enemy of the dust-cloth, no matter if it is of softest silk or brier-stitched cheesecloth hung in the chimney corner in a bag embroidered with a motto, asserts that the heavy hand of Euphemia scouring it round and round leaves lines and zig-zags on furniture

## PLATTERS AND PIPKINS

and woodwork like those that flying cinders groove on the windows of a Pullman car.

On the other hand, a model housekeeper — an Ohio housekeeper — declares that the feather-duster is put to a far better use when worn as a head-dress by a South Sea Islander or a North American Indian. Furthermore, a competent, though popular writer on health and hygiene, has sounded the warning: “Let sleeping microbes lie” — over doors and windows and other difficult places, rather than disturb and scatter them, to be innocently swallowed by members of the family — all through the agency of the feather-duster. Of course, it is perfectly reasonable to say that dust, thus disturbed, is not removed; that it rises and settles again; and so certain was one feather-duster opponent of this, that, detecting Euphemia furtively dusting the rungs of a chair in the prohibited manner, she lost her temper, and at the same time her dignity, jerked the brush from the maid’s hands, broke the handle in two and tossed the fragments into the grate, exclaiming: “That thing shall *never* come into my house

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again!" She added, being wonderfully bold and fearless, "If you disobey me again, *you go.*"

Euphemia did not disobey her again, because she did not remain long enough to dust another room with a brush, or without it. In her own pertinent and impertinent language, and with the match factory and the mitten factory advertising daily for hands, Euphemia said "she didn't have to."

The summing up seems to admit some argument on both sides. The cloth, no matter how soft, does leave grooves and lines; but, with a light touch this does not happen, and a dexterous finger can introduce it into the tracery and lattice work of the imitation Chippendale now in vogue. Furthermore, dust allowed to remain in these lurking places becomes damp and black and then solidifies, until it is as hard as the wood to which it is attached and can be removed only by thorough redressing. Another item in favor of the dust-cloth is its washableness.

To the model housekeeper, and to her humble and less successful imitator, there is a sense of

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comfortable abundance in a whole shelfful of hemmed dust-cloths, as fresh and clean and as neatly folded as the table-cloths and bed-linen, and to be as often changed. These perfect dust-cloths are not for a moment to be confounded with those of coarser quality, for commoner use, and much less with the shabby rags that leave trails of lint and thread everywhere.

I refer only to those that go to the wash every week in generous relays, and are as smoothly ironed as the pillow-cases.

The feather-duster admits of no such treatment, but it will still be favored by those who, with good reason, are afraid of step-ladders. As for disturbed and scattered microbes, they are everywhere, it is urged; there is no escaping them, and a few million more or less floating about do not appear to shorten materially the allotted span of human life. There is in hotels, and perhaps in those houses where every member of the family, including the baby, has a suite of rooms and an automobile, a huge machine by which both the sweeping and dusting are done. This is the

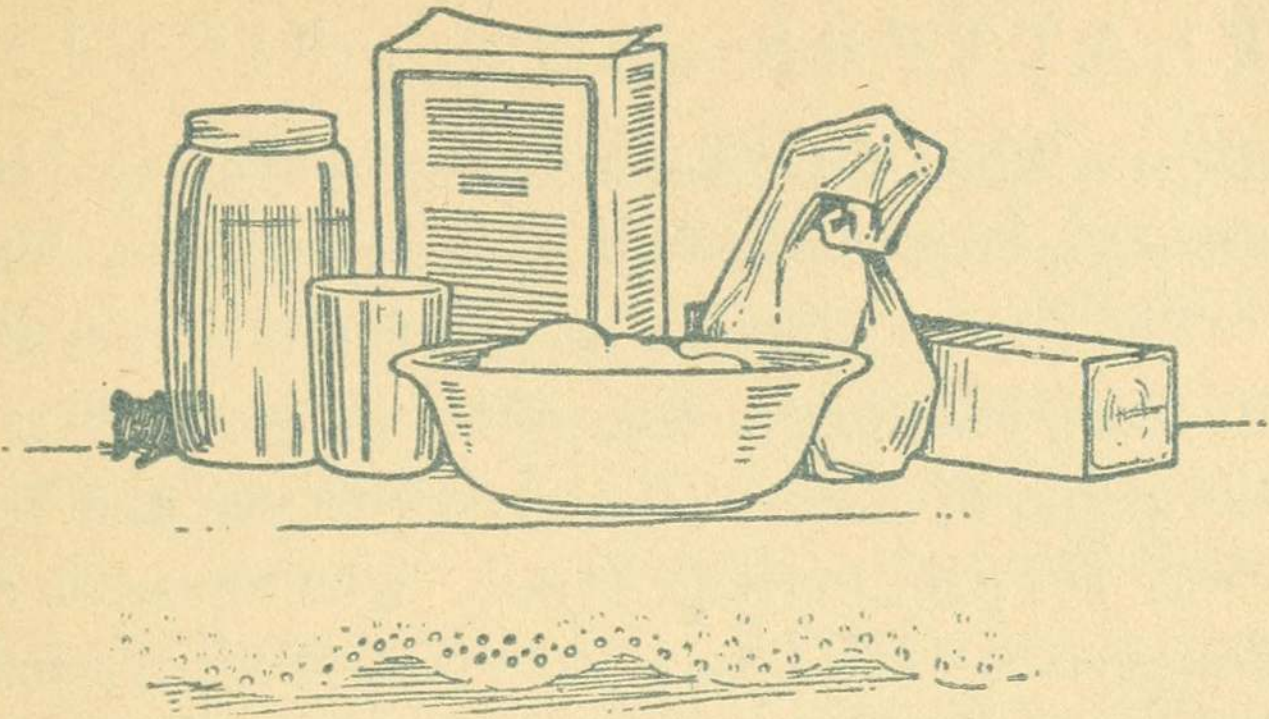
## REFLECTIONS ON DUSTING

vacuum cleaner, to which I have already respectfully alluded. It arrives with considerable clatter and confusion, mysteriously covered with canvas, which appeals strongly to the imagination and inspires one with distinct doubts and fears. There are usually two men or more in charge, and as it is trundled across the threshold one might well mistake it for the apparatus of a surgeon about to undertake a major operation, or some sort of a contrivance for inflicting instantaneous and painless death. There is a still more imposing variety, common in cities, operated by a steam engine which, of course, stands outside in the street, and from which lengths of hose are carried into the house, and from room to room. The engine outside puffs and pants, the dust is gathered up and forced into the receptacle — also outside — and when the house has been gone over from attic to cellar, the hose is reeled up, the engine trundles down the street, having performed its whole duty, like a dull but useful citizen. The automatic method, like cremation, is steadily growing in favor, and may one

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day be in general use, but to me a room cleaned in this way has none of the freshness and brightness that follows old-fashioned sweeping and dusting with a cloth. Hand-work in dusting will probably always be preferred by the fastidious, as in the case of the superior arts — painting, carving and embroidery. The hand is the natural tool of the brain, and there is an intimate relation between them. Where the task is bungled — no matter what it is — there is almost sure to be behind the clumsy fingers a turgid, intractable mind. To realize this is the beginning of all domestic wisdom. Euphemia, washing the French gilt clock with Sapolio, or scouring the porcelain bathtubs in the same way, is thus logically explained.

Machines will never mend matters, whether propelled by gasoline, compressed air, or electricity, while the same limited intelligence is in charge. The real domestic problem must, after all, be solved by hand, and complicated modern appliances seem often to introduce into the house only a new element of bother.



## VI

# The Pantry Shelves and Door

**T**HE pantry shelves are often the foraging ground of many predatory species, even in what appear to be well kept houses. Flies buzz angrily and throw themselves against the screen outside the window, lured by the smell of dainties and ready to force an entrance at the first opportunity.

Here, if permitted, the horrid cockroach prowls, tainting what he does not eat, and the huge, bloated water-beetle, glossy and black, greedily joining the others in the work of spoli-

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ation. Then there are ants, big and little, black and red, large and small, and, last of all — mice.

The hatred of mice, except for their destructiveness, has always seemed to me as senseless as the panic of a horse that takes fright and runs away for just nothing at all. The mouse is *not* dangerous. His bite, unlike that of his repulsive kinsman, the rat, is not venomous. His little body is a model of grace and elegance, from the fine, pink-veined ears to his delicate and exquisite feet; his soft, silken coat is beautiful, and his eyes are bright and intelligent. He never attacks, unless brought to bay, and even then he gives one the merest nip, that does not hurt much more than a pin scratch. I learned to tolerate, if not like, mice, from a habit I had, when a child, of taming and petting them, and carrying them with me to school to beguile the ennui of the multiplication table and the parts of speech. I found them peaceable and companionable in their little cages, which were securely hidden in my desk, among my neglected and ill-used books.

But, having thus done justice to the attractions



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of mice, I am forced to agree with their enemies that they are wholly out of place on the pantry shelves. Their footprints, though pretty from an artistic standpoint, are not appetizing or decorative on butter or cake icing. For the impudent invader of this forbidden ground, there can be nothing but the trap; but it should be one that does its work speedily and humanely. Some of the devices used by women who profess to be tender-hearted are instruments of genuine torture — even those recommended by members of the Humane Society, who talk vehemently against cruelty to animals and the wearing of machine-made bird's wings in hats.

There are various things that will drive away the smaller vermin — borax, hellebore, corrosive sublimate, and, it is said, the fresh parings of cucumbers. Large black ants, it is well known, devour the small red ones — seemingly drawing the color line, for they never appear to molest the smaller species of their own complexion.

Most vermin love darkness because their deeds are evil — a proposition that is applicable to

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many creeping things. For this reason, every pantry should have a large window which will freely admit light and air. There should also be a cupboard with solid doors for jellies and such supplies as are chemically affected by too much sunshine.

Plates for cooking — not those that properly belong in the china closet — should be stood upon edge within a cleat close to the back of the shelf, while bowls and cups and pudding dishes should be turned upside down. All this is perfectly well known to most housekeepers, but not all carry it into effect.

The upper shelf in the pantry is very often a catch-all. There are put away the cracked dishes kept for old associations, the pink-flowered sugar bowl that belonged to one's grandmother; the teapot with the broken nose, that was great-aunt Honoria's; the old grimy candle-moulds that did duty long before the days of kerosene and gas; boxes of dusty bottles, forgotten balls of twine and ancient parcels of garden seeds that are always spilling.

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One reason for all this flotsam and jetsam is, that the top shelf is hard to get at. The insecurity of the step-ladder has been noted, and in addition to this grave fault it must be carried from the cellar or the back passage and climbed. The lower shelves, too, must be cleared to receive the rubbish that must be lifted down to be sorted or removed. So dreadful are accidents with step-ladders that, before one begins this, one feels impelled to make one's will, or, at least, to study minutely all rules of "First Aid to the Injured." This is the true and real reason why the upper pantry shelf is occasionally neglected, in the houses of otherwise thorough housekeepers. If some person could invent one that could be raised and lowered at will by a set of smoothly working pulleys, warranted never to get out of order, his fortune would be made and the top pantry shelf would no longer burden the mind of any but theoretical domestic economists.

The slovenly habit of leaving food uncovered — except meats that are to be served cold, which should be allowed to cool thoroughly after cook-

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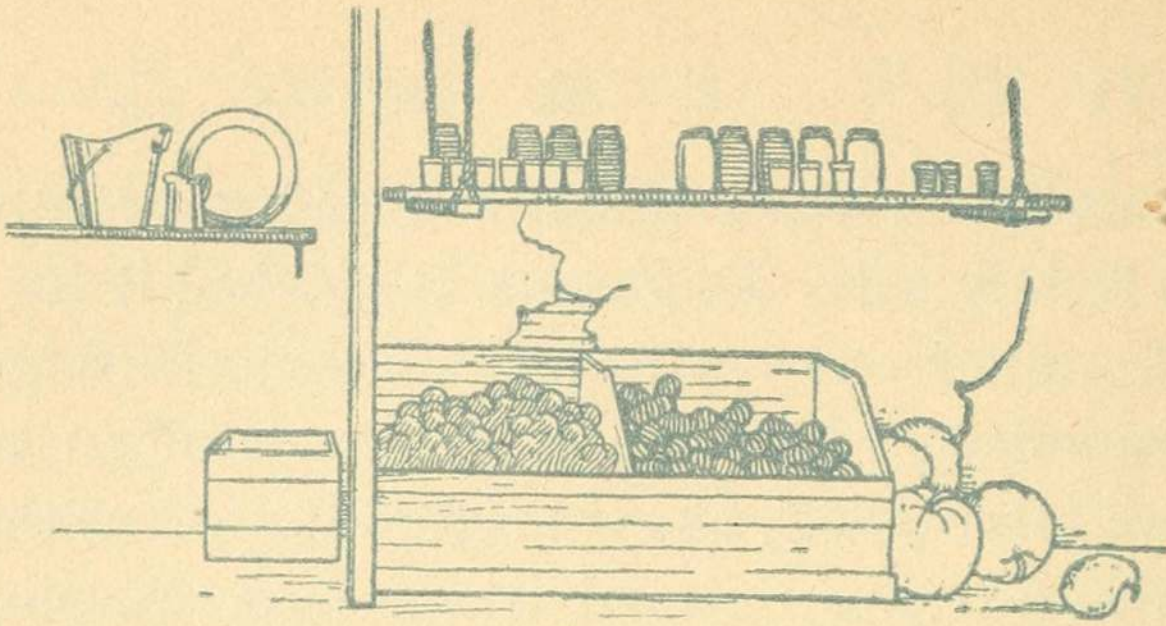
ing — is a habit to which Euphemia is prone. It is an invitation to mouse, ant and beetle to a bountiful and free entertainment. A few crumbs of cake, or pastry, a bowl of cold potatoes over which no one has thought to place a protecting saucer, the remains of the steak, a little jelly in a lidless tumbler, a spoonful of preserve in a glass dish — all are temptations which no mortal mouse or ant can resist. A pantry where such neglect is permitted inevitably becomes a rich field for the entomologist, but it must be spoken of under one's breath by persons who are averse to combining the wonders of Nature with their daily food.

The housekeeper has another and almost hopeless pantry difficulty with which to contend. It is usually desired to keep the supplies cool that are placed there. Who has ever been able to train Euphemia to close the door behind her as she goes and comes, carrying a cup of flour or a brewing of tea? No one — if she tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. A swing door acquires all manner of creakiness. It

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screams if you touch it, and will seldom or never close tightly after Euphemia has kicked it for a week. Some one has suggested that she might be reminded of her neglect by means of an explosive attachment, like the signal torpedoes that are placed upon railroad tracks as a warning. But what would it avail with Euphemia, after the first few days — she who must be called regularly every morning, although she sleeps with an alarm clock under her pillow of such calibre that it rouses everybody but herself in the house?

No; the only sure means would be for some reliable member of the family to take her stand beside the pantry door and close it, with her own hand, every time Euphemia entered and emerged, and this, in time, would prove monotonous and confining.



## VII

# A Few Thoughts About the Cellar

**H**UMAN beings, like rodents, have had, always, an inclination to keep their stores underground. Princes and others favored of fortune, in the "Arabian Nights," frequently found, just at the right moment, convenient flights of steps leading down to subterranean palaces, or gardens wherein jewelled trees gave of their perennial riches, and where air and sunlight seemed to be superfluous.

The delightful old pirates, whose manners were often perfect, after capturing and scuttling

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a ship, habitually went ashore to bury their plunder in the earth.

We know it is there that Nature has hidden her rarest and most lasting treasures, apparently to force men to dig and sweat for them, and thus, for the time being, keeping them harmlessly employed. The cellar has always been the storage place for creature comforts of many kinds, because, in the primitive days, when we travelled by stage-coach, subscribed to a weekly paper, and looked forward to the arrival of the new almanac, it was the only security against the heat of August and the frost of December.

There was a real charm about an old-fashioned cellar. How cool it was in midsummer, and how warm when the snow lay deep on the ground! The atmosphere was a perfectly blended fragrance of good things: yellow cream, sweet butter, honey in jars, and, in the apple compartment, bins of all the best varieties.

How well I recall the bushels of small crimson "Milams," of waxen pink-and-yellow "Sheep-nose," of the mellow and spicy "Bellflowers,"

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and the "Vandevere," unsurpassed for pies and mince-meat. How we hunted and sorted them over, for the very choicest specimens to give the teacher, as a peace-offering or as a means of currying favor, or to clinch a hard bargain with Emily Ellen in a trade for her depleted water-color box. The bins ran around the walls; the milk pans were set in shining rows on the shelves, and there were separate spaces for the less inviting potatoes and carrots. Collections of many-hued jellies, rich peach and cherry preserves, made by the old recipe, "a pound of fruit to a pound of sugar," that "kept" from their own exceeding richness like Oriental sweets, crowded the long, swinging shelf. Big, round pumpkins, showing a rich purplish bloom on their yellow surface, heaped in convenient corners, breathed intimations of Thanksgiving Day. In jars almost as ample as those to which the cunning Morgiana devoted her attention, were stored gallons of spiced mince-meat, sausage and "head-cheese" — the rich mixtures with which our grandmothers ruined their digestion and set their children's teeth on edge.



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There was no end to the resources of an old-fashioned cellar. It had its own catastrophes, too, like most things mundane. One that I remember best was subject to being flooded by heavy rainfalls. I used to lie awake listening to the dull beat of the deluge, knowing that there would be difficulty in getting the supplies for breakfast, and that the swarthy "Mexican Pete," who wore earrings, and had an insatiable appetite for red pepper, would arrive as soon as the storm was over, if sober, to pump out the water. I recall, too, tubs and tables afloat, and the hurried removal of spoilable things that had not been placed permanently above high water mark — as had the apple bins, and the big jars. I also have fond recollections of the clever cat named "Sebituane" (by my mother shortened to "Sooby") for the hospitable African chief who befriended Livingstone. Unlike most cats he was a fearless swimmer. One night he leaped into the cellar when the water was too deep to wade. He paddled vigorously to the cellar steps, reached the intervening pantry, there knocked down a pan

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of flour and presented himself, to our intense delight, much abashed and well dredged. Another bath was required, but for several days his black coat was quite stiff and sticky.

After Frances Hodgson Burnett wrote her "Lady of Quality," there was quite a furore for exploring the cellars of old London houses. And what well-preserved secrets did they not unearth? I was told that in one mansion whose mistress had died the previous century in the odor of sanctity two skeletons were dug up, buried many feet below the pavement. In her own beautiful old house in Portland Place, Mrs. Burnett occasionally conducted favored guests through what she called her "Tower of London Kitchen." At the fireplace an ox might have been roasted, and the stores in the wine-bins, in the heyday of its glory, might have quenched the thirst of Falstaff's army.

This cellar was much below the level of the street, and there were rooms without number, one beyond the other, with floors and ceilings of

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stone, the latter vaulted and groined like the ceilings of a crypt.

In the rear, farthest back of all, dark and breathless as a tomb, the use of which no man ever knew, was a mysterious cell. It was this sinister hiding-place that suggested the story and the concealment that followed the tragedy.

The cellar of a modern house has no traditions. There are focused many inventions, that, while intermittently beneficent, have long spells of the utmost malignancy. There is the furnace in which the fire goes out on mornings when the mercury stands at ten degrees below zero, and burns luridly in the unseasonable warmth of a hot day in March; the hot water plant, or the steam instalment, subject to what Carlyle called awful "gurgling and glittering," and occasional bursting; the gas meter that keeps on steadily measuring hundreds and thousands of cubic feet while the family are away for the summer vacation, just as it does when the house is filled with guests, or Euphemia is burning it all night in her room because she is afraid of ghosts.

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There, too, is the water meter, to which will be added in the near future an air meter, after a syndicate with a billion dollars capitalization shall have monopolized the atmosphere; with other already existent indicators, reminding one, as they noiselessly perform their work, how riches take wings and a moderate income evaporates.

The bins once devoted to the "Vandeveres" and "Rambo," whose praises have been celebrated, are now filled with coal or dusty coke, outdoing in ugliness the furnace above mentioned with its ugly brick foundation, or other heating apparatus, with all its ramifications of pipes and valves. The top of the furnace does make a good warm bed for the cat, where the masonry is of proper thickness, but that is the most that can be said for it. I have always detested all the implements that go with a furnace, because they are so big and sooty, so heavy, awkward and hard to lift: the long poker for scratching out jagged "clinkers" that multiply so fast and which though white hot keep on absorbing and never giving out heat; the capacious shovel that the man han-

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dles so airily — when he can be induced to handle it at all — and which serves, as nothing else can, to remind frail woman of the pitiless limitations of sex.

Then there is such a bewildering array of dampers to be regulated in all kinds of weather, one quarter closed, half closed, shut tight — a mistake with which puts out the fire, or fills the house with poisonous gas. I have dwelt upon the vagaries of the furnace in weather totally unsuited to those vagaries — the scorching heat it emits in the early autumn and spring when but little is wanted, and its sulking when that heat is needed; and I have always hoped that some plan might be discovered for storing caloric until it was required. Then there would be no such thing as a bad furnace. The heat which it often gives out below stairs and nowhere else, is also a fault, almost human in its imperfection. This has necessitated the construction of a cold chamber, else the potatoes will sprout, the apples shrivel and decay. Thus one so-called improvement brings on another, like the conse-

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quence of bad deeds, and so fast do they multiply that it is hard, at last, to distinguish the original from its consequences.

The most that can be said for the furnace, from an aesthetic standpoint, is, that when the wind is in the right direction, and the door can be left open, it sends a cheerful glow into the dark corners. And if it is responsible for effacing the hearthstone of poet and painter, it is much more comfortable to sit around a register, or beside a radiator, than constantly to feed a fire and carry out ashes. But when this is said, all is said.

Many cellars, or basements, have laundry attachments. With their stationary tubs fitted out with faucets for hot and cold water, the stove that keeps the wash-day smell out of the house, they are excellent things — if a laundress can be found. Nowadays, in her efforts to elude pursuit, she is like a fugitive fleeing and hiding from merited justice.

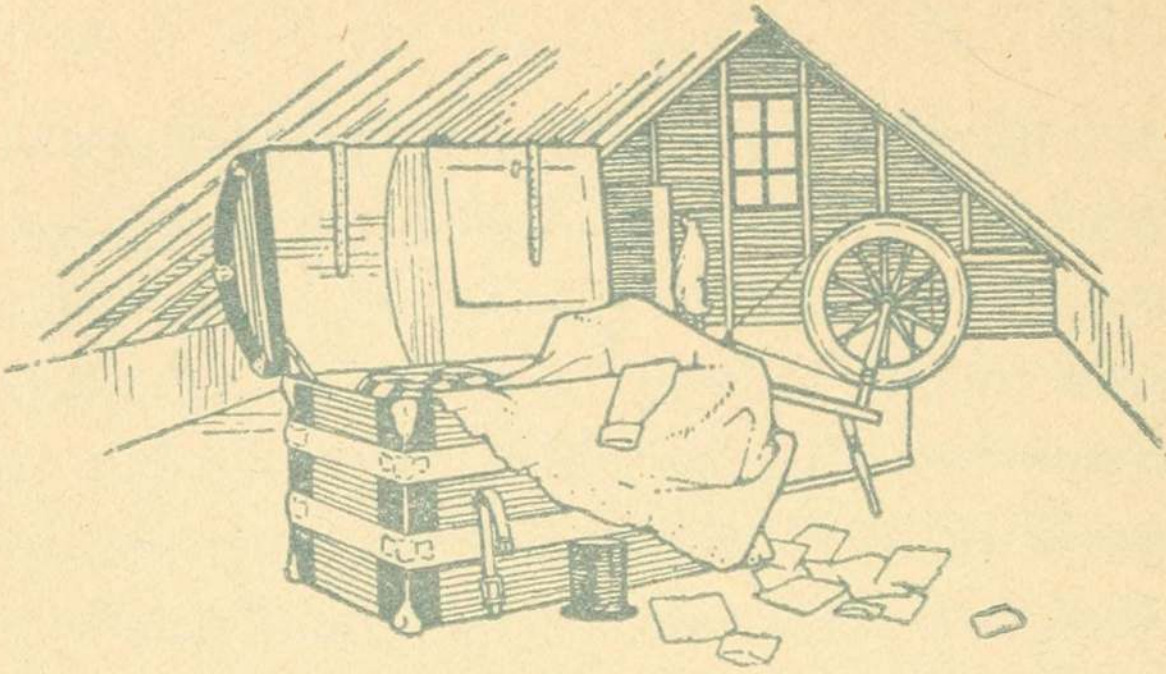
If she is white, her children have the measles. If she is black, she does her work between “pro-

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tracted meetin's" and the funerals of relatives — a connection so enormous that it never is lessened by continuous and frequently recurring deaths.

Even when she arrives, she must be allowed generous intervals in which to smoke her pipe and meditate. With her, washing day and ironing day, like the eternal Sabbaths of the hymn, "never end," but lap over into each other the whole year round. Still, it is something that she and her ways, which are not always "ways of pleasantness," are underground, where she may be left in solitude to smoke and soliloquize, without interrupting the established order on the floors above.

In considering this aspect of the cellar and its possibilities, putting all prejudice aside, the German semi-annual wash-day has much to recommend it — a mighty splashing, and clear-starching, twice a year, and then — peace.



## VIII

# Up in the Attic

**A**N ATTIC, dear to memory, was reached by a flight of enclosed steps from "the long bedroom." In the centre of the space one could stand upright and not touch the rafters, while the slope of the roof lowered gradually on either side until it touched the eaves. There was no real floor in the attic, only narrow, rough boards laid along the centre that clattered as you walked and gave you a delightful sense of insecurity. We were always cautioned to keep on the boards, and were



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held in check by a terrible tale of a "distant" cousin who inadvertently stepped off, and whose foot went through the ceiling of the room below, bringing a bother of plasterers to repair damages, at much expense and inconvenience. What would have happened had the hole been larger and the "distant" cousin dropped down bodily with a crash, we often imagined — a disquieting but salutary reflection. There were always families of fluffy kittens in the garret, behind boxes pushed back close under the eaves; and we peered around and over the boxes, thrilled with delicious fear at good old Tabby's eyes blazing in the dark. It was a harrowing catastrophe when once two of her many litters fell down between the plastering and the weather-boarding and had to be rescued by the intervention of the carpenter.

We could hear the scratching claws of pink-footed pigeons running over the shingles, and by putting our ears close to the weatherboarding we could hear the grumbling of the mothers and the petulant squealing of the squabs in the nests

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outside in the cornice — squabs doomed, alas! to furnish forth the most delectable pigeon pies that ever came steaming to the table.

In the summer, wasps came flying through the open window with their burdens of lint and mud for the nests which they built along the rafters. Big bunches of dried pennyroyal, hoarhound and catnip were hung up at intervals from these same rafters. Often were these supplies drawn from; when the children had colds, or their measles “would not come out,” or the newest baby was getting its first taste of human ailment in the throes of colic. These herbs gave out a dusty odor to the old attic that was pleasant enough.

The battered, hairy trunks that were stored in the place, to say nothing of other receptacles, were full of old clothes and parcels of calico, silk and woolen scraps — the “pieces” that we coveted and which we relied upon to replenish our dolls’ wardrobes. There were queer old hats and bonnets that we used when we wanted to “dress up,” and a chest, the lid of which we lifted with bated breath, whenever we could sum-

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mon up enough courage, getting a fearsome glimpse of yellow bones and grinning skull — for the grandfather was a country doctor and the unarticulated skeleton was a survival of his student days. There were also piles of medical pamphlets bound in glossy paper — white, yellow, green and blue, out of which we clothed our paper dolls with surpassing magnificence. From the dusty window we could see the flash of the cannon when the salute was fired on the Fourth of July, out on the village common. When tired of playing there were snug nooks where divans could be arranged from spare pillows and discarded comforters and where we read “Puss in Boots,” “Hop o’My Thumb” or “Swiss Family Robinson” to the patter of the summer rain on the shingles.

The child of to-day is sorely exercised and thinks much about her clothes. She knows that Santa Claus is a myth, that “Puss in Boots” is foolish and the fascinating ingenuity of “Swiss Family Robinson” quite impossible. Perhaps this is partly the reason why the attic, too, like

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all the rest of the modern house, has undergone a change which has added much to its convenience but has robbed it of the last vestige of sentiment.

Still another old-fashioned attic belonged to a delightful farmhouse. It was floored and plastered, the space at the sides only being reserved for storage, quite enclosed and entered by small doors that fastened with a button. In this attic, which extended the entire length of the house, there were three big four-post beds, and a window in either end which, left open on summer nights, gave full sweep to the west wind. The moonlight streamed in and lay, a silver patch across our beds, and the breeze brought the far-off barking of dogs from other farms, and the fragrance of sweetbrier, of new-mown hay and the clove pinks along the garden walks. We were always given a candle to undress by, and, to this day, the smell of a smoking candle wick brings back the memory of that pleasant place, although now

“All, all are gone, the old, familiar faces.”

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Through the day in the spring and summer it resounded with the cheerful hum of the spinning-wheel, for here all such work was done, Ann and Martha walking to and fro, drawing out the long thread that wound itself on the fast-flying spindle, while Aunt Polly sat, her half-blind eyes shaded by the sunbonnet drawn down over her face, carding the snow-white fleeces.

The attic of to-day is reached by a conventional staircase, quite as good as the best, forty years ago, furnished with a banister or safe hand-rail. It is liberally supplied with electricity, or gas jets, registers or radiators. There are several windows for light and perfect ventilation which are washed regularly and properly equipped with shades and sash curtains. There is a smooth floor for dancing, and even a stage for private theatricals or stereopticon lectures. Very little second-hand furniture is kept there because it has been either done over or sold to the second-hand dealer, or sent to the summer cottage. Whatever relics of clothing there may be are neatly arranged in drawers and wardrobes.

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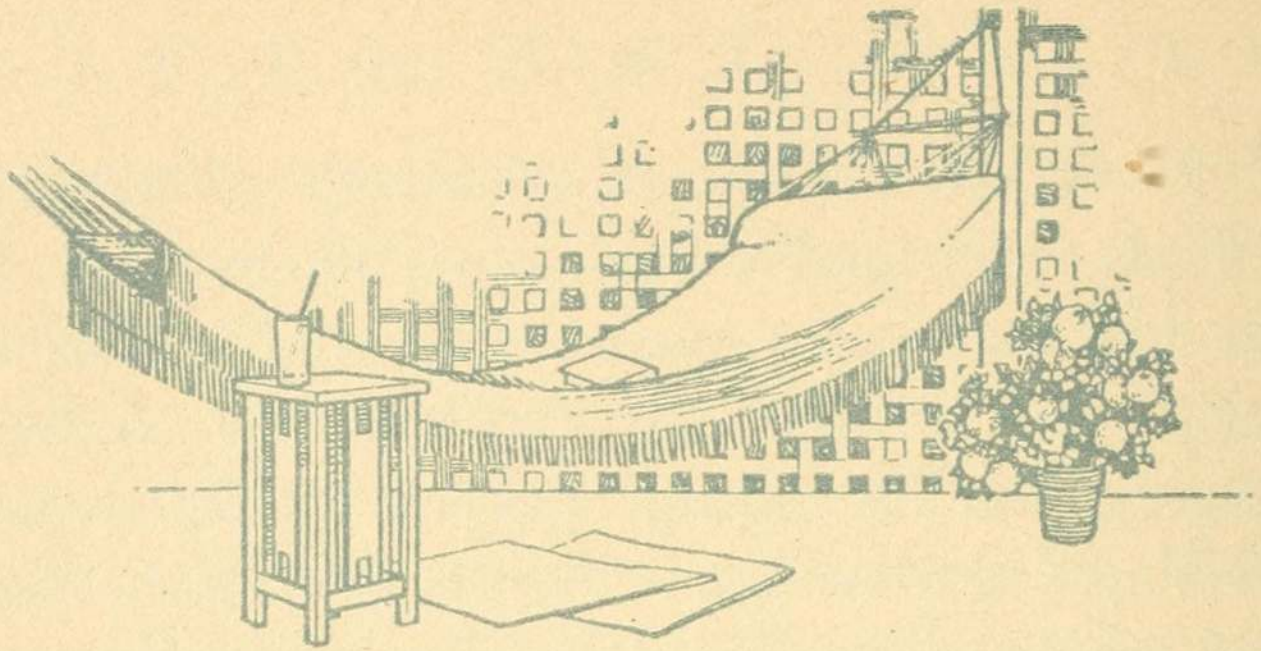
Occasionally the best satin gowns, with laces and silken scarfs, are stored here in long cedar chests. Here little Rollo, who was put into spectacles at eight, declaims his speech for Arbor Day, and Julia practices reading the paper that she has written for the reunion of her "sorority" — hatefullest of all words, except "smart" and "swagger." No fairy tales for them, or paper dolls, or watching wasps, or thrills at Tabby's fiery eyes, if you please. They have reached a loftier "viewpoint," "a higher plane," "along these lines," to quote again the phraseology of platitude. But it must be confessed — once more — that what the attic has lost in one direction it has gained in another, and the laundress — when there is one — is thankful for the clean, roomy place where the Monday washing can be dried on Monday, without postponement, regardless of the weather.

Once in a while an attic is neglected and rubbish accumulates distractingly. This is the attic of the overburdened, or procrastinating woman, who fully intends "to get at that attic one

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of these days," but never does. Sometimes she is only discouraged, and no wonder, if she has married a man who has the horrible habit of saving old newspapers — yellow, bulging bundles dating back to the debate on the Fugitive Slave law; others recording the stirring events of the Civil War, from Fort Sumter to Appomatox; illustrated journals, technical papers, all tied up with strips of list, or fuzzy hempen string. One of these days the procrastinating woman may be of that company of widows who immediately make bonfires of such collections when there is no longer a strong marital hand to restrain them. Then she will really clean up the attic, and the work of renovation, once begun, will be carried to its last resolution.

She would never, of course, acknowledge it, but when the last *Tribune* of December 30, 1850, is reduced to ashes, she will have a chastened sensation of satisfaction, like Mrs. Belden in "The Breadwinner," who found a real consolation for bereavement in at last having all the hooks on both sides of the closet for her gowns.



## IX

### Round About the Back Porch

**S**OME new people had bought the fine old house next door. The sheds and rookeries in the rear had been torn away and a spacious porch had been built, instead, extending to the upper story, enclosed in a lattice.

“Why are they doing that?” asked the wondering neighbor. “Everybody knows that a back porch, especially a latticed back porch, is a perfect catch-all. The clothes-line and the basket of clothes-pins and the washing machine are



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always left there. The baby's perambulator is wheeled across the door where you stumble over it in the dark. In the fall there will be crates of cucumbers and mangoes and tomatoes, and in the winter, buckets of coal."

The view of the wondering neighbor was despondent, for, even as a repository for cucumbers and mangoes and tomatoes the back porch is a great convenience, and doubly so if screened by a neat lattice. When vines are framed over it — the splendid *Cobea scandens*, pale moonflowers, clematis, or even the many-hued morning glory — it becomes a bower, a vernal retreat, where one hears but faintly the puffing automobile or the rattling trolley, and is not pained by the grocer's boy who drives by on the delivery wagon, lashing the sweating horse for a race with a rival while the mercury stands at 90 degrees in the shade.

A distinguished woman whose husband was a famous litterateur and diplomat, often talked of her back porch and how much she enjoyed it, in the first serene days of her simple housekeeping.

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“I had my sewing-machine out there in the summer,” she said, “and I remember an unexpected visit we had from General H — on a heavenly September morning. He came quite unexpectedly — on horseback, for we had no railway connection with the outside world in those days. The breakfast table had been set on the back porch where we always ate during pleasant weather. I was baking waffles and he sat down and had coffee and waffles with us, and then we talked. How pleasant it was!”

The humbler visitors, too, use the back porch — a very different class from those who arrive on foot, in carriages or motors, to be admitted by the front door, card-cases carried decorously in hand, on one's day; or the doctor making his professional call when there is sickness in the house; the clergyman paying a pastoral visit; the company bidden to the wedding or some other high festivity, or, those who come silently and unasked — old friends and acquaintances — on that last occasion of all, when there is no brightening eye and no outstretched hand to welcome them.

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But, if all these prosperous folk know nothing of the back entrance, by way of the back porch, it has its own familiars — the red-faced butcher's boy who calls for his order; the grocer's man on the same errand; the milkman with his crimson cheeks and his cap drawn down over his ears on frosty mornings, who tells you that "he never heard tell of formald'hyde." Then, too, the back porch has its touch of romance. Euphemia sits there star-gazing on the steps, the weather permitting, with the arm of her latest admirer around her waist. He tells her wondrous tales of personal prowess — how he got even with the boss; of the lucrative jobs he has had, or refused, or expects to get.

Occasionally Euphemia sings. It may not be generally known, but there is a whole lyrical anthology, familiar only to persons of her calling. Many of these songs are simply sentimental; others are dismally tragic, as these verses, quoted as rendered, will show:

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“My tender parients brought me up  
Pervided fur me well,  
And in the city of Lexington  
They placed me in a mill.  
At last I saw a pretty form,  
On her I cast my eye,  
And then I saw another one  
That suited me full well  
And Satan put it in my heart  
My first true love to kill.

“I asked her fur to walk with me, —  
To walk a little ways —  
That her and me might both agree  
Upon a wedding-day.  
I took her by the lily-white hand  
And led her to the place,  
I took a rail out of the fence  
And stroke her in the face.

“She fell upon her bended knee  
And did for mercy cry,  
‘For Mercy’s sake O, pity me,  
I’m not prepared to die.’  
But little did I care for that,  
I only stroke her more  
Until I ended that sweet life,  
I never can restore.”

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By far the larger part of Euphemia's repertoire is equally gloomy, although occasionally she bursts forth with a cheery lilt like this:

“On the banks of the Minnehaha, my love,  
On the banks of the Minnehaha,  
We will buy us a farm and together we will live  
On the banks of the Minnehaha.”

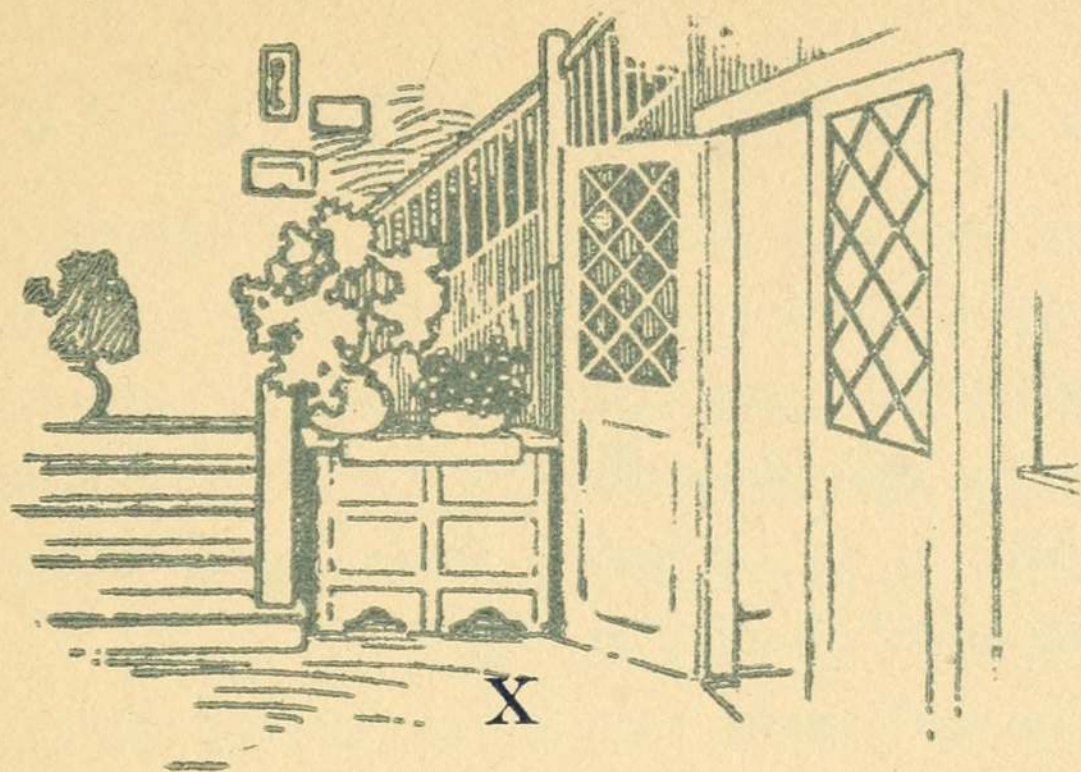
As in compositions of a higher order, poetic license grants wide latitude in these songs, dear to the heart of Euphemia, in matters of geography and other items which, after all, are not essential to the emotions or the imagination.

In the leafy retirement of the back porch, the telephone cannot be heard; you cannot be called up while absorbed in some intricate bit of sewing, or a book which must be finished that day, to be asked if that is the Police Station or Smith's Foundry.

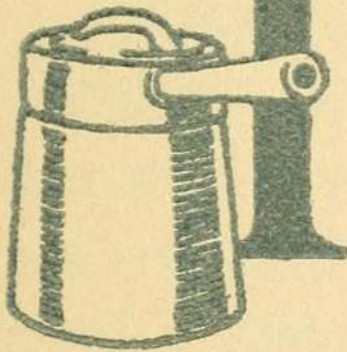
The door-bell, too, rings faintly, so you miss the poor, much-to-be-pitied canvasser, who in very bad grammar tells you at once, and patronizingly, that she is from Boston and is the agent for caustic soap and face-powder.

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You may ply the sewing-machine uninterruptedly, or finish your book in peace, for the representatives of trade, unwilling to curtail five minutes of their protracted interchange of pleasantry with Euphemia, seek her boldly and pass by. Yes; there is much to be said in favor of a back porch — with a lattice — and the house which we have been building in imagination, for years, shall assuredly have one.



## Through the Hall to the Front Door



**I**N nearly all old English houses the hall furnishes evidence of family distinction. It is emblazoned with splendid coats of arms, with trophies of the chase, weapons and mediæval armor, with works of art and settees of carved oak. In the houses of the well-to-do in our own professedly democratic country, the hall may boast a good polished oak floor and fine rugs; but there are other unconsidered thousands who are content if, with hard-wood floors and rugs, there

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is a table, a hat-rack and a hanging lamp of wrought iron. The main staircase, with a cathedral glass window at the landing, it is thought, affords sufficient diversity, particularly if there is an imposing newel post and an upborne sheaf of electric lights.

The hall is a fair index to the taste of its owner and the home-making instinct of his helpmate. I remember how painfully and conclusively this was proved once in a search for habitable lodging in a western city. I had cut from the morning paper a long list of addresses, those of people in reduced circumstances who offered all the comforts of a home for a modest consideration, or received "paying guests" — a sinister term borrowed from England. What revelations followed that day's fruitless quest! Door after door was entered, some with bells whose slack wires jangled like the broken strings of an aged piano; others with a sort of twirling ratchet arrangement, or electric buttons that failed to respond, or that began ringing and would not leave off. In many places the doormat was



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ragged to the last degree and clogged with lint and sand; on another you could faintly discern a half-obliterated and highly satirical "Welcome" — in faded red letters on a dun background. There were cobwebs around the transom and slits in the shades of the side lights and curtains that were ragged and hung askew. There was much difference in the agility of the maid, or landlady, who admitted one; the door opening so promptly in some places as to suggest that the maid or matron in waiting had been resting on the stairs, rather discouraged that so few came, and ready to spring, panther-like, at the first tinkle; while others presented themselves at a leisurely pace, chewing, perhaps, as if they had been disturbed while taking a little refreshment. The door open, what a stale, dead atmosphere greeted one! so heavy, with so much "body," that it seemed remarkable it had not settled down, visible, over everything, like a "London Particular." It was the lingering effluvia of hundreds of "boiled dinners" in which the distinct odors of onions, cabbage and carrots could be immediately recog-

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nized. Through the Cimmerian gloom one had glimpses of a soiled and ragged carpet, a huge, grim chandelier, with stair rods displaced, or missing. As a comforting reminder that man is mortal, and that earthly suffering must finally have an end, I noted one cheerful wall decoration—the plat of a large, new cemetery that could be reached quickly and conveniently by the car line that passed the door.

Now, whatever may be said, and though there are men and women who will find fault with Heaven, should they ever get there, the average lodger does not ask the impossible. So many boarding houses now accommodate—or profess to accommodate—business women, and this class patronize laundries—unless they are sending home money to their families on a salary of ten dollars a week. They do not invade the kitchen to “rub out handkerchiefs,” or “press out two or three collars”; they hire all this done, glad that they have not to do it themselves. Such women are more than grateful for common comfort, which by the way is most uncommon, and

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they count just plain, unpretentious cleanness a luxury.

When such an applicant for room and board finds a front hall which has been well swept, or the floor of which has been brightly polished; where pure air circulates freely and there is a reasonable amount of light, she looks no further; she knows, instinctively, that the rooms above and below stairs, however simply they may be furnished, will give satisfaction. The mattress will not suggest a collection of wire rat-traps, and she will not be forced to invest in hammer and nails to patch up things that are falling in pieces, or buy cheap stuff for drapery to hide splotches of shoe polish or kerosene on the wall paper.

The well ordered hall, which may be plain as it can be, gives cheerful assurance of tidiness and comfort which can usually be relied upon.

I remember, once, taking lodgings in London upon the sole and unsupported testimony of the "wax-cloth" in the "passage" — the brightest blue and brown, upon which not a speck of dust

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could be seen — even in that sooty town! They were the only English lodgings I ever occupied where the vegetables were cooked done; where the aromatic mint leaf was left out of the green peas, and where the entrées might have been the handiwork of a French chef.

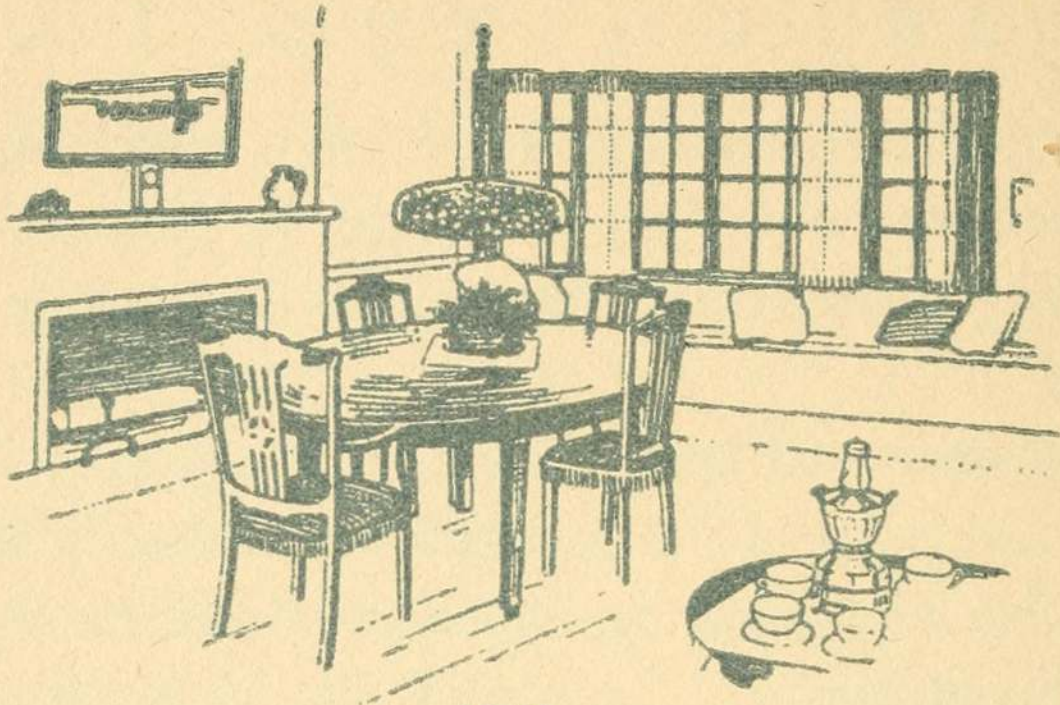
I spent months there, and left only because the husband of the landlady — a gentleman of extremest leisure — had a trying habit of pounding the table with his fist and bawling at “Scott,” the maid, who was always, consequently, in a state of abject terror. But *he* had not wiped up that immaculate wax-cloth and had no place in the logical sequence of the good housekeeping for which his garrulous little wife alone deserved the credit. The deduction still remains unassailable; the polished brass knocker and door-knob were as bright and cheerful as the shining sun, as was the whole house — when the master was away.

It is not surprising that, from a conscientious apprenticeship, Sir Joseph Porter, K. C. B., rose to be “the ruler of the Queen’s navee.” It was

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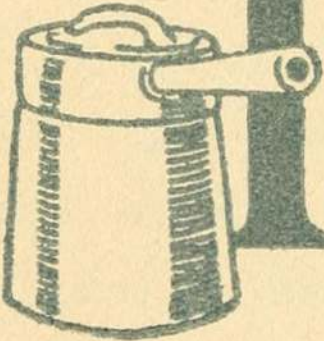
the merited promotion of one who had not shirked, but who, in youth, had, to the best of his ability “polished up the handle of the big front door.”

He deserved well of his country, and it was the most natural thing in the world that he should have been idolized by “his sisters and his cousins and his aunts.”



## XI

# The Dining-Room



**I**N most houses the dining-room is set apart for one function only, the serving and eating of meals. Among persons of moderate means one corner is frequently occupied by the sewing-machine, while the long table, when it is not required for its specific use, is utilized for "cutting out." Scraps are scattered about which Euphemia picks up unwillingly. For a brief season — while the fall and spring sewing are going on — such a dining-room is not comfortable.

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In many prosperous, middle-class houses in England the dining-room is the common sitting room. In the morning, at least, the table is covered with a cloth of serviceable woollen material, of some warm, dark shade; the prints on the wall are always good. In cold — not cool — weather a clear fire burns in the shining grate which is scrupulously black-leaded every morning — such is the subjection of English housemaids, even yet — and there is a high, bright brass fender, with a fender-stool, worked in old-fashioned cross-stitch. The sideboard is loaded with glass and plate — the latter authentically hall-marked — and at a nice little desk near the window the mistress, with characteristic promptness and courtesy, answers the notes that have come by morning post, and goes over her house-keeping accounts. There is space for a sofa, and here the boys lounge — seldom the girls — reading novels. The cherished cats and dogs have the run of the house, including the dining-room, even at meal time, and while they are sometimes

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well-behaved, at others they take liberties that shock our sense of propriety.

With us, however, no one sits in the dining-room. There seems to be an unwritten law that it must be left to itself, except at meal-time, and during the few minutes of gossip when the family think they may loiter at table. At most, the children spread out their atlases and dictionaries under the convenient light, after dinner, or write their essays and exercises there, undisturbed.

And yet, much time and thought are often given to beautifying the dining-room, to the selection and arrangement of all its belongings; to the plate-shelf, with its array of jugs and platters, the chairs, sideboard, table and rugs.

There has been a reaction against pictures of dead game and fish, and peaches and strawberries spilling out of overturned baskets. Apparently these have been consigned to oblivion, with spinning-wheels and decorated snow-shovels. The impression is spreading that pictures on the dining-room walls may be, without offense,



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just as good as those elsewhere in the house.

Sydney Smith loved books, not only for their contents, but because they "furnished a room." In the days of his comparative obscurity he longed for a room, the walls of which should be lined with books in bright bindings. In his lonely and remote Yorkshire parish, where the coaches of his titled visitors mired in the mud in front of the drawing-room windows, his wish was gratified. With the coming of more prosperous times, he was able to have the books and they were all collected upon shelves, not in a library, but in the dining-room, where he surveyed them with satisfaction at least three times daily. They were compensation for mud and lack of near neighbors.

Whether used as a sitting-room or not, there should be, if possible, an abundance of sunshine — cheerfulness, in any event. Most of us are disposed to begin the day in a state of querulous irritability more or less suppressed, according to our theories of politeness. Why this is true, no one has ever explained. But it must be sadly

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admitted that there are comparatively few who are as good-tempered at breakfast, no matter how trying may have been the labors of the day, as they are over the mid-day luncheon or the after-dinner coffee. Sleep should refresh one, though to be sure all do not sleep, and to these, morning brings only lassitude and weariness. Such sufferers must be pitied and forgiven, if nothing suits them, though they are enjoined not to inflict their morning megrims upon their innocent and unoffending brothers and sisters.

Because so many of us do come to breakfast soddenly and heavily, it should be above all others, an appetizing meal, — the coffee clear and fragrant, the eggs flawless, with the toast brown, crisp and tender, with fruits and melons in their season, and flowers fresh as dew. In the country all these things are obtainable, most of them being home products; and in the city, with overstocked markets, luxuries often come within the reach of people of very moderate means.

One of the most delightful dining-rooms I

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have ever seen was that of a friend in one of the enchanting hamlets of the Hawaiian Islands. It was separated from the parlor only by an archway with an inconspicuous grille, with narrow open spaces on either side of the archway, in which were placed fine foliage plants that were of a most thrifty and luxuriant growth. The floor was covered with soft, white Japanese matting. I cannot recall a single detail of the furnishings — everything about that house was in exquisite taste, for all its simplicity. But I recall even yet, with delight, the deep, recessed window with its broad, cushioned window-seat. Just outside was a strip of ground set thick with nasturtiums of many shades, and at the edge of the flower-plot a perpendicular cliff fell sheer to the sea.

From that wonderful window-seat the great Pacific Ocean, blue as sapphire, or grey as a cloud, reflecting the tropical sky above it, stretched to the horizon and on and on, the waste of water unbroken by a single island, to the coast of South America.

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Sails shone in the offing, and occasionally a great man-of-war dropped anchor in the harbor, and far away, ethereal as a dream, rose the snow-capped peak of Mauna Kea. To the north were groves of dark-foliaged palms and mangoes of exquisite grace, their broad leaves swaying slowly and fitfully in the trade wind. I thought at first, "This is beautiful—now, that it is summer, but what will it be when winter comes?" Then I remembered that there is no winter in those Fortunate Isles. Some days there were storms; then the surf rolled in and tossed its spray against the cliff with a resounding roar, and the trade wind answered with its deep, strong cadence.

But even Mahomet could not bring the mountain to himself, chosen of Allah though he was; and such a seascape, with its tropical setting, it is not given many to study and enjoy while doing justice to substantial creature comforts. The point is, however, that my friends might have selected another part of the house for their dining-room— one to the rear, or overlooking the

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road; but they did not, and I have always thought that their close companionship with the great and mysterious ocean must have had a very real influence in their daily lives. For without laboring to be cultured they were people given to high thinking, of sweet, tranquil dignity and natural gentleness of speech and manners.

Another wonderful dining-room was in London, superbly adorned with costly Delft — hearth, mantel and wainscoting; with chairs, table and sideboard of some lustrous wood which I did not know. The napery on great occasions was a marvel of antique needlework. The dull London street was shut out by windows of stained glass that filled the room with a softened, opalescent light. Much of the talk of that splendid table was of London, and reminded one of Henry James's declaration — "Nowhere else is there such fulness of life."

The main features of that luxurious dining-room may be out of the reach of most people — the Delft, the antique needlework, and the host

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and guests, who had drawn from the resources of the whole world their power to entertain.

But it is possible for the humblest of us to take into the dining-room a cheerful countenance, pleasant and gracious speech, a ready willingness to bear with dulness, and to make no sign if the fare is disappointing and unpalatable. Such evils should not exist in an enlightened society, in the houses of the intelligent. But they do exist, in dire crises, for there are failures everywhere against which human ingenuity is powerless to contend.

It is of benefit to reflect, then, that while bad coffee is unpalatable it is not really harmful, and tough beefsteak and heavy bread may be eaten occasionally — not habitually — with no lasting bad results. It is certain that a poor breakfast, even after a restless night, is not a sufficient cause for surly complaint, or for the bad temper that affects the digestion and makes others feel sad and unhappy for the rest of the day.

A smooth, spotless cloth, shining china laid with precision, a sharp carving knife and steel

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ready at hand, a cheerful, clean, well-ventilated dining-room, are a good beginning for the day's work, and if the meal is wholesome, however plain, and the conversation agreeable, those who are thus fortified go forth to meet their responsibilities with augmented courage.

It has become a fad with many to eat no breakfast — an abuse against which the body, which requires sufficient and regular nourishment, must finally rebel. It is not only the simple nutritious fare that cannot be foregone, but the pleasant talk, the advice, the encouragement, the suggestion which the aroma of coffee seems to inspire.

Three pauses daily, in the rush of work, three reunions daily around the table within the encompassing walls of the dining-room, are not too many.

It would be a blessed thing if it were possible for all — for the boys and girls who carry their luncheons to school, for the husbands and fathers who hurry to the restaurant and then hurry away again, inviting wretched invalidism and criminally shortening their lives — to return

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instead for their mid-day meal to the restful quiet and better fare of the home.

The spread of rapid transit in every direction brings the school and the down-town office into closer and closer proximity to the family dining-room, and it is a factor in health and happiness not to be underestimated.





## XII

### Table Talk

**T**ALK at table demands very serious consideration. It has acquired a meaning of its own and brings to mind men and women of affairs — Macaulay and the arbitrary Lady Holland, Sydney Smith, the poet Rogers and his breakfasts, Lord Houghton and Longfellow, in once classic Cambridge — all denizens of the high world, gifted, brilliant and witty, with a wide knowledge of art, literature and science, and of strange, interesting countries. Out of the fulness of such knowledge and mental equipment their

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talk could not be other than delightful, and for their proficiency in a difficult accomplishment they have been immortalized in history, and their utterances live after them.

But it is not of such table talk as theirs that this brief commentary has to deal. It is, rather, with the ordinary conversation of every-day talk on the practical things of every-day life, which already has been casually touched upon.

But it will bear further discussion. Some of us have an involuntary superstition as to the sort of a beginning we make of the day, and we are almost persuaded that there *is* a visible tide of circumstance that sets in with the morning and does not turn until the sun has gone down.

A number of homely proverbs — the survival of generations of folk-lore — deal with right and wrong beginnings, and warn one to make, if possible, a propitious start in whatever task or pleasure one may have essayed. As has been remarked, good-tempered, interesting talk, and a firm determination to regard indifferent cookery with tolerant patience, when it is not persist-

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ent, makes a most propitious beginning of the day's work. With self-control and amiability the selection of suitable subjects for talk at table, particularly the breakfast table, where they do not present themselves spontaneously, should steadfastly be borne in mind.

There is one topic that should be eternally tabooed and that is — disease and painful accidents. Upon this point Emerson has written with authority. He warns us of the unwisdom of making even the most formal inquiry as to our neighbors' health lest it set in motion a flood of particulars impossible to check. He lays such stress upon the avoidance of disease as a theme for talk that one almost hesitates to ask: "How do you do?"

Christian Scientists, however much of their theories we may reject, especially that of "malicious animal magnetism," hold one vital principle, that to dwell upon disease mentally is to invite it. It is not an invention or discovery of that cult, since such a belief has existed for ages, and it is a well-known physiological fact

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that thinking of it seriously retards and impairs the function of digestion.

And yet, what a common topic is sickness and accident as table talk, amongst those who in all other respects are charmingly polite. Who has not been forced to sit at table with intelligent people and listen, powerless to change the subject, to interminable discourse upon tonics, pills and plasters.

Even worse are the descriptions of symptoms and "attacks," and minute accounts of horrible catastrophes that make the flesh creep. One of these days we shall come to look upon all such discussions at table as another evidence of defective civilization, far more reprehensible than the misuse of the knife in the past.

There is no end of pleasant things to talk about, so the inherently unpleasant should be rigorously barred — sickness above all, hard luck and misfortune — all the disagreeables that it is the fine flower of courtesy to bear in silence, or to mention as seldom as possible, and never at table.

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The interesting and amusing happenings that have brightened the days; the new book that is being read; the plans that are being arranged for some important event; the permissible gossip of church, society or club — all these afford material for talk that goes well with the morning omelette or the dessert that ends the dinner. The shortcomings of servants, the stupidity of Euphemia, the impertinence of the seamstress, their waste and mischievous blundering, also belong to the list of domestic “dons” — no matter how painful and palpable may be the evidence of their sins, set forth in plain view. And while the mistress endeavors to meet her trials with a calm, unruffled front, the master should strive to excel in well-doing of the same sort, keeping to himself the vexations he has endured, and leaving to the tête-à-tête any objections to domestic matters he may be disposed to offer, and such exhortations to economy as he may consider are urgently needed.

Another species of tiresome talk, which reminds one of those examples in the old grammars

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headed "errors to be avoided," is that which abounds in dogmatic statements meant to be stolidly and laboriously improving, which are hurled at one's head like so many bricks. Argument, at table, has no justification at all. It is, usually like the great matter which a small fire kindles. It begins with some apparently unimportant remark which is questioned or contradicted; the debate on either side becomes more and more heated and noisy, each faction gaining supporters until presently the entire family is involved in it. It is doubtful if argument under the most favorable conditions has ever accomplished so very much, after all. People make up their minds of their own accord, each for himself, the conclusions which they reach being worked out from a mass of pros and cons. Juries may be swayed by it, but not until they have been forced to listen to the testimony of many witnesses, cross-examination and rebuttal; and even after all this they disagree, very often, the few "hanging out," testimony and debate both having been lost upon them. If, then, professional de-

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bate, highly technical and thoroughly searching, can prove so futile where vast interests are involved, how much more futile is it when there is a mere personal point of view to be sustained, that will benefit nobody, when all is said and done, and which serves only to spoil an otherwise enjoyable meal.

As bad as stubborn and excited argument, is the habit of reading the newspaper aloud. There may be some excuse for the husband and father who will have little leisure during a busy day if he props up the paper and scans the headlines as he eats his toast and drinks his coffee; but it is not a habit conducive either to health or to the genial companionship that should refine the business of eating to something more than merely satisfying the wants of the body. But far, far worse is the odious habit of reading aloud stories of railroad wrecks, dull leaders and stupid and witless attempts at humor. This is invariably done by the most inexpert reader in the family—the young man who stumbles and blunders

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over the hard words, or the young woman who has never been taught "to mind her pauses."

Only that which interests and entertains all, young and old, comes within the scope of perfect table talk, and reading aloud is no substitute for conversation. The custom was once ordained, and still is in force, in monasteries and convents — during the brief time spent over the coarse fare in the refectory, where conversation at meals is prohibited. Then the "Lives of the Saints," or excerpts from church history may be welcome, furnishing food for reflection. But the rule that applies to the monastery is not applicable in the family or to the morning paper.





### XIII

## Where the Books Are

**S**YDNEY SMITH was right when he said that books furnished a room and, as has been related, it is pleasant to remember that he lived to enjoy such a room — whole shelves filled with beautiful bindings in which he took a never ending delight.

The requisites of a perfect library are plenty of space and light. In these records of domestic facts and possibilities I have dwelt much upon the importance of light. The iteration and reiteration may have grown tiresome, but, like

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Martin Luther, "I can no other." There are certain awful ailments to which light is inimical, but to the normal human being it is the source of health and happiness. Nowadays, when there is such a frantic searching of encyclopedias and maps — the children "looking up" the endless data they are required to "stand and deliver" with their daily lessons, and the club member "reading up" for the paper she must prepare — a good light and a large table are highly desirable.

The library, or book-room — which is all that most places can rightfully be called in private houses where the books are kept — should be a practical workshop, well supplied with paper, pens, pencils, ink and blotting paper — the last mentioned not to be forgotten. If in cool weather an open wood fire is possible, the last touch of luxury has been achieved.

If the shelves are high, movable folding steps should be at hand, and it is necessary for the proper care of books that all bookcases be supplied with glass doors even at the sacrifice of

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artistic effect. Curtains, no matter how ornamental, are not enough, and are certainly no improvement over glazed doors from an aesthetic standpoint.

The present method of heating houses, though a vast gain in cleanliness, dries the air, and in spite of all correctives is destruction to books. The paper and bindings that have been preserved through long years of stoves and grates go to pieces, drop into fragments or are reduced to impalpable powder by the dry heat of the steam radiator.

Books should be taken from their places and carefully dusted at regular intervals, and an old booklover of my acquaintance is in the habit of reversing choice volumes on the shelves — large, heavy volumes — to relieve the strain of one position, which he considers injurious.

There are few people who really know how to care for books as they should be cared for, and this is very largely because they have never been taught. Our public libraries are monuments to our national abuse of books. Within a short

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time the books become grimy from the unwashed hands through which they have passed, and the leaves are dog's-eared or defaced with annotations the reverse of those with which Coleridge is said to have enriched every book that came into his possession. The marginal comments of the average reader are nearly always pointless, flat and stupid. Occasionally a reader of the old school attempts to correct the slipshod English of the latest popular author, substituting a grammatical "which" for a misused "who," correcting the steadily increasing split infinitives and restoring a dislocated "only" to its rightful place. But it is a hopeless task, whatever be its crying need, and there would hardly be space on the margins of many popular books for corrections urgently demanded in the interests of pure English.

When I come upon the pencillings of the ordinary kind — usually exclamations, running largely to adjectives — I have a sensation as if some one were reading over my shoulder in a husky voice and breathing on the back of my

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neck. Such notes are salutary, occasionally, as a corrective to intellectual conceit, for they reveal to the unconscious author who imagines that he has mastered the mother tongue how little he has been able to convey his real meaning to what is now known as the reading public. I remember finding in a copy of Walter Balestier's "Benefits Forgot," obtained from Mudie's in London — which is not patronized by the uncultured masses — an annotation that will serve as an illustration.

The story, as will be recalled, is a remarkable narrative of moral conflict and development. Some one had scrawled upon a fly leaf: "A Very Silly Book."

This was not the slightest reflection upon the skill and genius of the author; it was the scribbler who stood, self-confessed, a dolt and a clod.

A great deal of the tendency to maltreatment of books by the rising generation might be corrected at school, although it would be adding to the burdens of teachers, already sufficiently heavy and constantly increasing, and shifting to their shoulders duties that should be performed by

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parents at home. Not long ago I visited a model school in a Western city, and a boy — a fine well-dressed, well-behaved lad, — handed me his spelling-book. It was so dirty that I was glad that I had not removed my gloves. The book was chewed and warped, scrawled with rude caricatures and a confusion of pencil marks that made the print almost indecipherable. It was the lad's private property. Perhaps where text-books are supplied by school boards such wanton abuse would not have been permitted. But it should not have been permitted, though the book was the boy's own. There was something positively brutal in the treatment it had received, and I observed that it called from the teacher, who had apparently not discovered it before, only the mildest "Dear me!"

I do not wonder that there is now an accepted theory that contagious disease may be spread by books taken from the free circulating libraries. If their soiled pages are not the lairs of all manner of malignant bacilli, where, then, shall the creatures be found?

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The conscienceless borrower is another enemy of the well ordered library — the person who never returns a book, or who keeps it month after month and is then indignant when the owner calls to get it; who props up the window, or the leg of an unsteady table with it, and uses the scissors for a book mark.

“I *am* so sorry,” said a woman who always boasted of a reverential love of books, “but little Alfred got hold of your ‘Omar Khayyam’ when I left him for a moment. He is simply *wild* about pictures. I didn’t know that he was eating a cream puff at the time, and I could have *cried* when I saw what he had done.”

And so could the owner when *she* saw what he had done.

Unless one wants his library to vanish, volume by volume, it is necessary to keep a strict account of all books as they are loaned and returned. The borrower who never returns a book, or brings it back so soiled and maltreated that it is fit only for the furnace or the old-rags-and-paper man, should be ruthlessly blacklisted, and no further

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favours should be granted. If this rule is hard to enforce, then books that tempt the ruthless borrower should be kept out of sight and never spoken of. Nothing should be left lying about but things like "Young's Night Thoughts," and "the best selling novel."

There is a real pleasure in sharing one's books with friends who enjoy them, and who, because they truly love them, handle them as delicately as you do yourself; who will not lend them again without permission, who will not surrender them to little Alfred, whatever may be his budding taste for art. To such friends one's shelves should always be free, and to no other.

While reading or study is in progress, silence in the library is, of course, an imperative necessity. There are fortunate ones who can forget themselves in a beguiling volume to such an extent that conversation may rage, an army might almost deploy around them and they would be blissfully unconscious of it. I recall one such enviable person who used to sit buried in Froude's "Queen Elizabeth," wholly unaware that her



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brother across the table was executing the most florid compositions on the flute. But concentration like that is a gift from Heaven.

Many readers — real readers — have sensitive nerves with an acute sense of hearing, and it is difficult to fasten the mind upon the printed page, when disturbed by shuffling and fidgeting, or, worse still, by teasing, sibilant whispering.

When not occupied by readers for a legitimate object, the library is likely to be a favorite congregating place. Somehow, family councils here take on an air of dignity and importance, and the very presence of the books seems to inspire one to good talk in which every one takes some part. Here the best stories are told, adventures related, the summer outing is planned, the European tour, the journey to interesting places in our own country. The various routes are followed on the convenient maps, and what has been said of famous places by famous people may be looked up on the instant.

The furnishing and decorating of the library deserves even more careful study than is given

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the drawing-room or dining-room. A clear north light is always desirable, but perhaps not more so than a south window that admits the sunshine all winter, which may be subdued, if so desired, by proper shades and drapery. There is no more certain evidence of the practical use to which a library is put than is shown in the manner of its lighting. Some estimable people once bought a splendid house which had been built by a man of taste and culture. When the purchasers moved into it they proceeded to rearrange it according to their own ideas. An ugly view in the dining-room had been hidden by a superb stained glass window which did not darken the room inconveniently for the use for which it had been planned. The newcomers, who cared a good deal more for showy bindings than for the contents of any books whatsoever, very promptly selected the dining-room for their library, because they never wished to read, nor were their intimate friends ever disposed to use it for that purpose. They had no need of light, and the stained glass window, consequently, was no drawback.

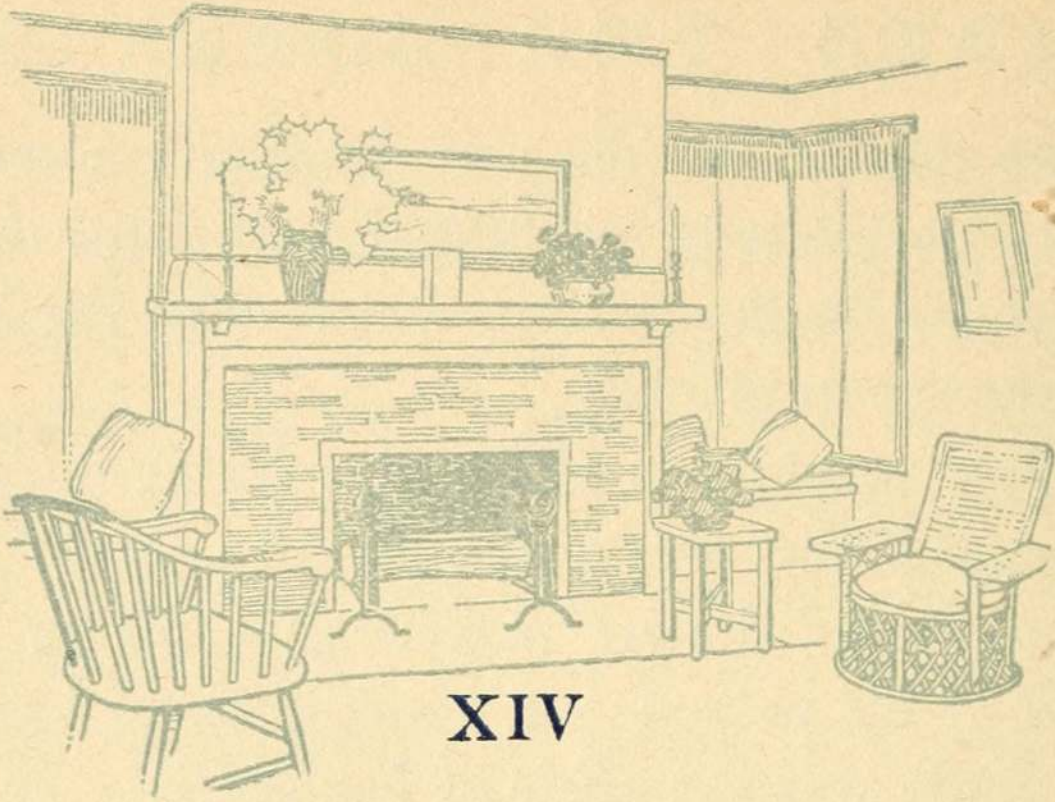
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The decorative ideas of amateurs sometimes run to portraits of poets and historians, done in distemper on the ceiling, which only the keenly observant can identify.

“How would you like a nice frieze, ma’am, of books, as if they was a standin’ on a shelf — some of ’em fallin’ down?” asked an aspiring kalso-miner of his patron — a woman, whose beautiful new study was the pride of her heart.

Warmth of color, simple, tasteful furniture, a noiseless clock with a dial upon which the numerals can be read across the room, lamps with softly-tinted, clear shades — these come next in importance to the equipment of the shelves. Given the necessary taste, all this may be had by people of moderate means; and it is impossible to others who have the wherewithal to gratify the most extravagant fancies, and little else.

The library, in daily and constant use, should be the pleasantest room in the whole house.



XIV

## The Evolution of the Parlor

**T**HOSE of us who have the courage to confess that we still delight in Dickens, in the face of recent realistic fiction, recall that in his stories the parlor was a snug retreat behind the shop where the family partook of tea, shrimps and buttered toast; or into which the genial innkeeper invited travellers toward whom he was especially well disposed.

The drawing-room was the state apartment in the great house, and I recall how I was charmed,

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as a child, by an enchanting picture of the drawing-room at "Chesney Wold," in a beautiful English edition of "Bleak House."

In our country, "drawing-room" is the term which has always been most in favor in the South, while in the West and in New England we cling to the "parlor" of our shop-keeping forebears, although we have ceased to spell it with a "u."

The New England parlor has a distinct place in American fiction: from Hawthorne to Howells, it has been presented as a room where grim, stiff furniture lurks amid darkness seldom broken in the Arctic cold of the long winter, or in a summer atmosphere that is redolent of mould and potpourri.

We are also told that the sacred solitude is seldom disturbed, except when the minister calls, at the regular spring and fall cleanings, weddings, funerals and Thanksgiving.

When the darling "Lady of the Aroostook" had been married and came back to her native village, the occasion was deemed of sufficient importance to be celebrated by a frosty little gath-

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ering of neighbors in the parlor. A fire was lighted in the air-tight stove, where wood and kindling were laid ready for such emergencies; cake and coffee were served, imparting to the occasion, as the delightful chronicler informs us, an almost sinful sense of dissipation.

That was years ago — in the days when real novels were written — before the era of problem plays or vitiated fiction. There has been a wonderful liberalizing influence at work upon the New England parlor, as with most of New England's inherited customs and traditions.

In regard to the relinquishment of many of the old convictions, strange cults have sprung up; spiritualism first, then theosophy; Christian Science, with all its offshoots, ramifications and "malicious animal magnetism" — and lastly a still newer revelation based upon what are called "vibrations" — intelligible only to a small, esoteric circle. There will be, one of these days, possibly a reaction and a return to at least a modified form of the old beliefs.

During the last decade the hand of change has

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been laid upon the tightly closed shutters of the New England parlor, owing to the persistent efforts of the present and more liberal generation. First, a few dim rays of light were admitted — enough to reveal the haircloth sofa with some distinctness, the tidies, the daguerreotypes opened at the same angle in an even row on the mantel; the family Bible and the big lamp on the centre table; the hair wreath in its frame on the wall. When it was found that the light did no serious damage, the blinds were turned a little more; and of late they have been flung wide, and in many localities the parlor has lost its sanctity.

In a thriving hamlet in Connecticut I saw but one house where a well-beaten track led to the back door, and where the unbroken sward from the gate to the front step proclaimed the fact that the front entrance was “for looks” only, and not for general use.

The furniture, in this evolution of the parlor, has been led a lively chase. In families where the daughters went away to school, or paid long visits to progressive friends in Boston or New York,

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they came home — this was in the early 70's — with a firm determination to remove the old heirlooms to the attic. And they did it.

The first stages of this reform filled the spaces thus left vacant with chairs and divans of black walnut upholstered in green reps that faded — oh, how it faded! With the green reps were curtains of Nottingham lace, vases for the mantel and an onyx clock, and there was a ruthless sweeping away of the old daguerreotypes. About that time, too, the chromo lithograph was invented and popularized, and first came Whittier's "Barefoot Boy," and "Wide Awake and Fast Asleep."

It is not to be supposed that modern improvements stopped here. Through the medium of art journals, Kensington designs became known; then followed Eastlake furniture. This, also, has had its day and ceased to be, and we have settled down into a tolerant acceptance of whatever is good, insisting only upon a reasonable degree of harmony, and demanding that Japanese and old



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English shall not be placed in too close proximity, lest they clash.

There are still some doughty souls who have not been intimidated by the hue and cry after microbes. They still cling desperately to their carpets fastened down with tacks. But the change to rugs and polished floors which I appear to have emphasized with perhaps tiresome iteration, *is* an incalculable improvement, and it is an object to which the truly public-spirited may devote their energies with profit to the country at large, in order that the fashion may be universally adopted and remain.

The Swiss rocker still lingers furtively in a few dark corners, where it betrays itself, like an ill-tempered dog, by the jangle of its internal machinery and a vicious propensity to nip the carelessly suspended hand of the absent-minded person who seats himself in it. There are now — worse luck — really shocking tables, with drop-sical bulges and carving suggestive of the planing mill, sofas that recall Procrustes and cabinets that make one gasp; but there are also charming

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and really good things that may be had, by those capable of choosing them, at a moderate cost.

We have never followed the English custom, fortunately, of so crowding the drawing-room that it is difficult to move about without stumbling over ottomans or running against tables overloaded with fragile bric-a-brac. With all the changes, there are still few houses where the drawing-room is commonly used, though in these days of informality and thorough heating, there is no reason why it should not be. Tradition still unconsciously tempers custom. It is in some more favored haunt, which is often given some peculiar, local name by the family, that the genius of intimate hospitality holds sway, and that the most familiar altar has been reared to our Lares and Penates. Callers who are not on terms of intimacy; the distinguished stranger; the committee; the gentleman who presents a letter of introduction — these and their like are received in the drawing-room, as they always have been and always will be. But though the window shades, nowadays, are always raised, the

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sun shines in and the doors stand invitingly open, the drawing-room, with all its splendor, is deserted, except on solemn and formal occasions.

Why? There seems to be no good reason except that which I have given — its old-time exclusiveness still repels familiarity.

There is another — all rooms, in large houses, at least, have specific uses and each its own special attraction. The piano is in the music room, the books in the library, and it has been learned — none too soon — that it is unhygienic for two persons to occupy the same bedchamber, so that each member of the household gathered in the family congregating place, wherever it may be, is disposed frequently to slip away to write a note undisturbed at his or her own desk; to snatch a moment on the lounge, or meditate awhile behind the closed door. This leaves the drawing-room deserted, in solitary grandeur.

Not so very long ago I attended a funeral in a stately Kentucky mansion. The family had been one of position and importance for some six generations, and it had held the original freehold,

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bought from the government, for more than a century. The house was big and empty, and many of the rooms, being disused, had at the last reverted to two aged, unmarried women. The younger of the two, who was past seventy, died first; then, five years later, the elder. She was ninety-three, still stately and distinguished in manner and appearance, but she had long outlived her generation.

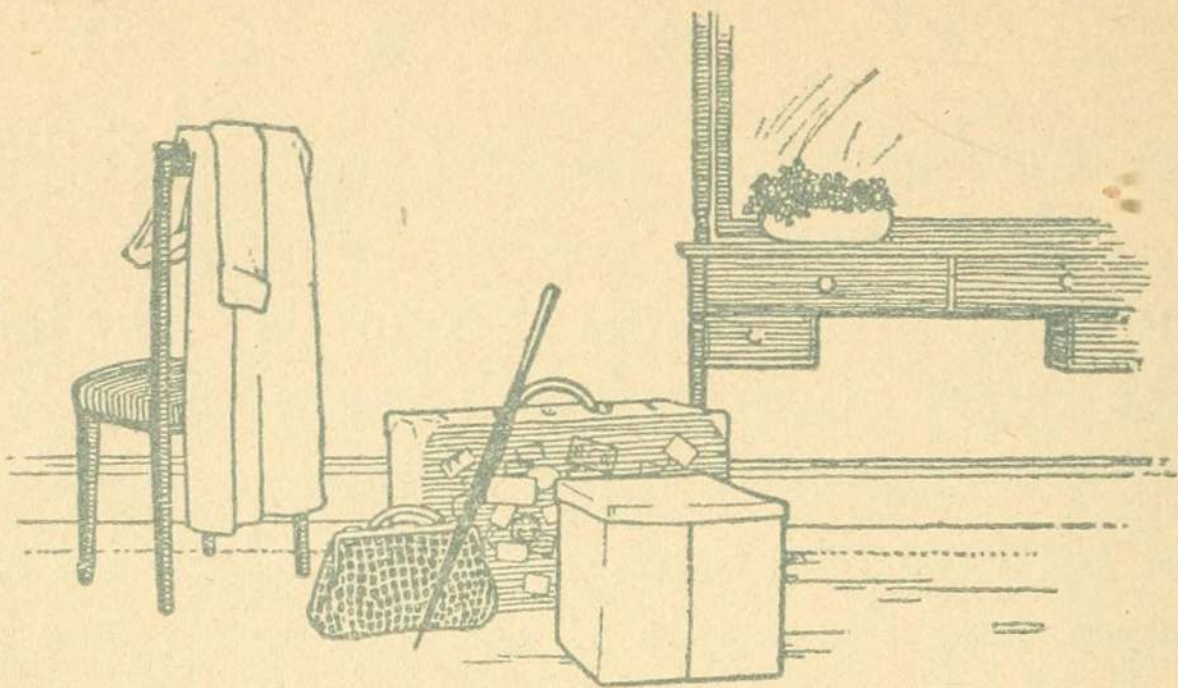
The funeral was held in bitter winter weather; fires were lighted in the great drawing-room upon whose hearths no blaze had shone for nearly four decades; the rose-brocade-covered furniture was still shrouded in the Hollands covering that had enveloped it for years, the keys of the old piano were yellow as saffron, and the carpet, a thing of luxury at the beginning, was dimmed and blackened from the dust and soot of more than fifty years. For that drawing-room there had never been any evolution except in the direction of a gradual return to its elements.

It is now common to substitute in plainer houses a large living room for the less demo-

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cratic drawing-room. Its chief purpose is utility, but with it beauty is often cunningly combined and a great degree of comfort. The table in the centre is covered with books and prints; there are cushioned window seats, a fireplace, good pictures and a great variety of chairs and lounges, and the whole effect, as one crosses the threshold, is of refinement and good cheer. But a living room of this sort is practicable only in small families, especially where there are no young children. For, to enjoy play as they should, children must and will scatter their toys about, and harness the chairs together, resenting any disturbance of their arrangements.

As between the deserted drawing-room and a living room which the family really use and enjoy, it will not be hard to choose. A few dints on the table legs, or an occasional splash of ink on the rug, is not too high a price to pay for a living room meant really to be lived in.



XV

## The Secrets of the Spare Room

**H**OSPITALITY prompts one to give of his best to the stranger within his gates. Bearing this in mind, the spare room should be a pleasant abode, fresh and sweet in its attractiveness, appealing at once to the eyes of the travel-worn guest. "What a lovely place!" she exclaims as she disposes of her hand luggage, takes off her hat and wraps and looks about relieved and glad that the tiresome journey has had so fortunate a termination.

Perfect freshness of curtains, table and bureau

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coverings is an important requisite, and no spare room where a guest is expected, is complete without flowers in bowls and vases. What such a welcome means I never fully realized until once when I arrived, all unknown, in a foreign land, and found in the chamber assigned me quantities of pansies, exquisite in color and of heavenly fragrance, arranged in shallow bowls upon the bureau and table. Whenever I see pansies nowadays it brings back that pleasant house — the polished brasses of the door, the white steps, the rosy-cheeked maid coming out to the cab, in her black-stuff gown, pretty apron and cap with floating strings — all in readiness for the dinner which would shortly be served.

As the hostess seldom or never occupies the spare chamber she is sometimes unaware of its shortcomings, especially those of the bed, the mattress that may abound in lumps and ridges and broken springs. There should be abundant bed-covering, both comforters and blankets. However much some may object to the former, there

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is nothing that quite takes their place. A small, soft pillow should always be provided.

Who that hates to sleep, or rather, doze, in a semi-sitting position, has not been disheartened by the sight of huge, hard, smooth pillows that display the lace and embroidery of their covering to perfection, but are as little conducive to repose as an ancestral tombstone? Still worse is the bolster, even harder, stiff and round, with which one is sometimes left alone and entirely unprotected. The expedients that must be resorted to in contingencies are secrets that die with one — chair cushions, newspapers, and even one's clothing rolled into a bundle and slipped under the lumpy mattress. There are the experienced who carry with them always a small, soft cushion that adds fervency to their prayers of gratitude on many a night that, otherwise, would be sleepless. A shortage of bed-clothing, of which the hostess is often quite unconscious, is not an uncommon occurrence, even in houses where lavishness is the rule in almost every other particular. There are people who are always



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warm, like polar bears, and who have little sympathy for the feeble and thin-blooded. They cannot realize what it is to shudder and shiver under one light coverlet, until one is forced to rise and heap wraps and clothing over the counterpane, supplemented, possibly, by the floor rug.

Our English cousins, who are but indifferent cooks, and many of whom appear to have only the most rudimentary ideas of the primary colors, are wise in other lore that we should do well to acquire.

One thing they consider imperatively necessary, upon which Charles Reade, forgotten, now, like others of his peers, has discoursed at length; this is — airing the sheets, — in the sun in summer, and in front of the fire in winter.

Another good English custom is, placing a lounge at the foot of the bed that the latter may not be disarranged by use during the day. Chairs should be chosen for pure comfort and not merely for appearance, although it is possible to combine the two. Looks alone cannot be relied on; each must be sat in — tried — before it is bought

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and sent home. Many a pleasing arm-chair, judged only by externals, proves to be an aggregation of knobs and convex curves to which an elastic serpent alone could adjust itself.

The pictures and ornaments should not be too many. Each should be as good of its kind as possible, chosen with care and taste. A good New England bishop who had an abounding sense of humor, used to tell of his adventures in the spare rooms of his diocese. In one house he was shown to a guest chamber, in which, probably, there had never been a fire. The mercury stood at zero; frost coated the windows, and he saw by the dim light of his candle, through the cloud of his congealing breath, a row of — silver coffin plates, gruesomely arranged on the mantel! They had been thriftily removed from the family coffins and there preserved as mementoes.

As to pictures, I am reminded of a fine wood-cut framed and hung opposite the bed, in another spare room. It represented a lowering sky and heavy spray tossed high against the rocky cliffs. In this room a member of the family lay ill with

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fever through many painful weeks. Even in his delirium his eyes were fixed upon that picture of cool, tossing spray, and when he recovered he said that it did more to save his life than all the doctor's medicine.

In still another spare room, dear to me from a hundred pleasant associations, the pale green wall-paper and the white matting gave always the impression of a grotto under the sea, an effect heightened by the screen of dancing leaves pierced through with sunshine, outside the window. In this chamber of peace, when the sleeper awakened to the consciousness of the most luxurious bed ever devised, her eyes rested on a beautiful French lithograph of Rose and Blanche Simon — the lovely twin sisters in "The Wandering Jew" — and their faithful mastiff, "Kill-joy."

In the present superabundance of bridge prizes and anniversary souvenirs, to say nothing of the trophies of universal travel, far too much of which goes into the guest chamber, the tendency is toward what our grandmothers called "clut-

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ter.” The picture cards, illuminated mottoes, bits of china, baskets and bibelots of all kinds, give an effect of smothered crowding.

An old friend of mine — past grand mistress in the art of perfect housekeeping — will have none of these things. She has even banished table covers. The furniture is severely plain, with polished surfaces and little carving. There is nothing to catch and hold dust. Pincushion and bureau covers are of pure white linen, changed frequently and carefully laundered. The dressing table is provided with a generous supply of pins of all kinds, sizes and colors, and with hairpins of assorted sizes. The match holder is always full, and a receptacle is also placed in plain view for those that have been used, so that they will not be put back among those that have not been lighted; or, while still burning, be tossed into the waste basket — for there *is* a roomy waste-basket — and so start a fire that may burn the house to the ground.

A bureau, or chiffonier, is a necessity — or “a chest of drawers” of some sort. Nothing is more

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trying or inconvenient than to "live in a trunk," forced to lift the heavy trays out and put them back whenever something is wanted, which is always sure to be in the very bottom. This is endured, with countless other miseries, by those who have become nomads through their own fault, or by undeserved misfortune. But there should be better provision within the home.

The writing desk, always conspicuous in English houses, is being better appreciated and more generally domesticated, of late years, in our own homes. It should be properly fitted out with pens, both sharp and blunt points, paper cutter, writing materials, postage stamps and blotting pads. The true lady bountiful does not omit post cards, domestic and foreign, or blanks for post-office money orders, which, presented at the receiving window, previously filled out, save time and, often, temper.

The desk, or table which is a satisfactory substitute, should not have underneath it either drawers or that terrible little shelf which makes a comfortable position, long maintained, impos-

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sible. Those who write steadily for an hour or more at a time must be able to extend their feet at their ease.

When there is a grate, or a fireplace — and blessed be the habitation in which the guest chamber affords either one or the other — the fuel should always be laid ready to light. Even during the long, hot American summer there come damp, chilly days when a fire is required, not alone for its cheerfulness, but as a means of warding off rheumatism and ague. For there are still thousands of the benighted who have not been brought to that beatific state of mind wherein they have learned to regard bodily pangs as mere errors of mortal mind. Of course, for those who have advanced beyond this weak “belief” in disease, no such precaution is necessary.

There should be also in the guest room — for the convenience of the woman guest — a small work-basket with a lid — always with a lid — supplied with thimble, scissors that will cut and with buttons, hooks and eyes, thread, silk and cotton, coarse and fine, and of several colors. The

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visitor may have forgotten her own, in this age of ready-made clothing and darning attachments to sewing machines, and it may be urgently necessary to sew on a button, mend a ripped glove, or take a stitch where gathers or plaits have given way, or an unlucky tear needs instant attention. Such damage cannot always be repaired with substitutes for the needle. Mending materials, just the ones that are required, and ready at hand, are a boon that will be gratefully appreciated.

A roomy shoe bag should also be fastened securely to the inside of the closet door. There is nothing more unpleasant to step on in the dark than a shoe that has been left lying about, and no matter how carefully boots and slippers are set away in corners, or under the bureau, they have an unexplainable faculty for gathering dust, all of which explains the real and crying need of a shoe bag nailed to the inside of the closet door.

There should always be plenty of reading matter, books and magazines, light and serious, not only for the time of afternoon seclusion, but as a

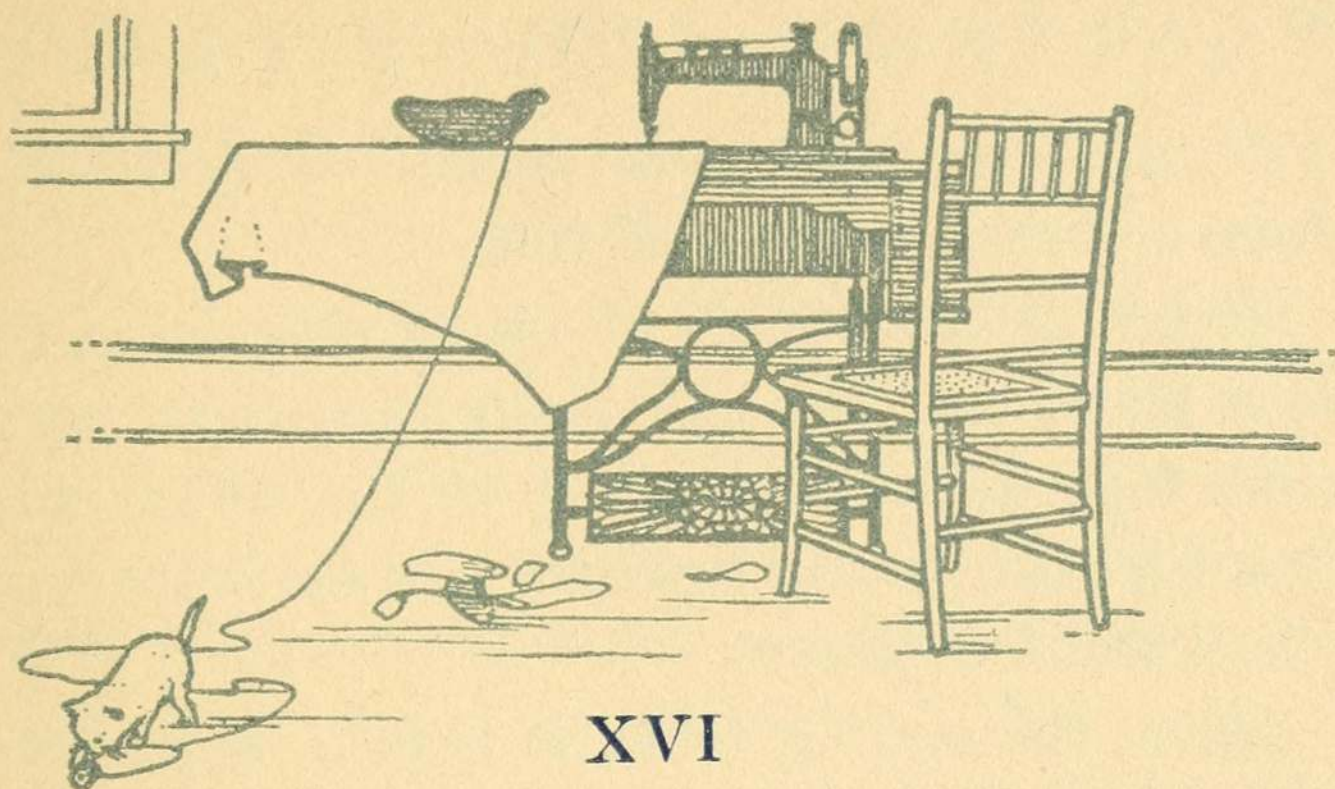
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means of passing possible hours of sleeplessness, when the night seems endless.

When everything has been made ready for the expected visitor, the mistress, no matter what may be Euphemia's proficiency, should take "a last look around." Something particularly necessary may have been misplaced, or forgotten. As a rule, guests bring with them their own toilet articles, but occasionally it happens that one has been urged to spend the night unexpectedly, and must depend upon her hostess's furnishing. Once, in the writer's experience, under such circumstances, the combs and brush were missing, having been placed in a drawer and forgotten at the last general cleaning. The visitor was forced to arrange her hair, before joining the family at breakfast, with her small and brittle side-combs.

Finally, and not least important, the hostess should not take it amiss, if the visitor chooses to spend some hours each day in the quiet and peaceful room that has been given her. It is rest and refreshment for both, and, like Portia's quality of mercy, is twice blessed.





XVI

## The Sewing-Room

**N**O matter what glamour may be thrown around it, the sewing-room is rarely inviting. The sewing-machine is hopelessly utilitarian, although a praiseworthy effort has been made to improve its appearance, making it like the cabinet organ that rears aloft a highly elaborate structure of scrollwork, shelves and brackets; or the square piano in its polished case which must still be supported by four stodgy legs. The sewing-machine is as necessary as the kitchen range, or the stationary

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wash-tubs, and almost as difficult to deal with from a decorative point of view.

It is now imperfectly disguised with doors, or as a table sunk in a box-like arrangement with a flat top over which a neat cover may be spread; but, with this device, there are still the betraying wheel and treadles.

Then, the cutting table, it is held, must also be a thing for purely common use — not too good to be scratched by pins and needles, or scorched when the flatiron accidentally slips from the pressing board laid across it. I have a confessed love for suitable, handsome clothes, but a line stretched across a corner of the sewing-room strung with tissue paper patterns mysteriously traced, figured and snipped, produces in me instantly an access of dull spirits. It is perhaps what psychologists call “unconscious cerebration” — the indefinite recollection of maddening struggles that I have had with patterns of the same kind, having been born with a deficient sense of proportion.

The sewing-room is a modern torture chamber

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to the inefficient needlewoman — it is the place wherein she has ruined yards of good material, cut skirts upside down, made two sleeves for the same armhole and “run” her seams straight where they should have been on the bias.

Said a woman whom I knew well, and who, with other natural mechanical limitations has the misfortune to be left-handed: “I have always dashed as fast as possible past the sewing-room door, ever since I cut the sleeves of my summer silk by the pattern for Willie’s knickerbockers.”

Of course, she did not mean to do it; it was just a mistake.

With other unpleasantnesses — to those who have no gift for sewing — are the scraps on the floor, the pins that are dropped, the dreary paper boxes of “findings” and trimmings — each and several, painful reminders of the difficult and gradual stages through which even the simplest garment must pass to its final completion — the fitting, the draping, the finishing, and, if luck is against one, the melancholy altering. Nowhere about the whole house can there be so much fa-

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tigue, anxiety and bother as in the sewing-room, unless it happen to be the habitat of one to the manner born, who loves to sew and knows how.

The mother who directs and assists at the regular autumn and spring visitations, witnesses there more bad temper and ingratitude — often from daughters who are ordinarily amiable and respectful — than she experiences anywhere else. If the walls could speak they would echo such outbursts as: “I don’t like it at *all*;” “it sags in the back,” “it wrinkles under the arms,” “it hangs abominably,” “it is too tight in the neck,” interspersed with sighs and even sobs.

Occasionally one outside hears a sharp, emphatic “stand *still!*” as if the one within were addressing a restive horse. It may then be inferred that Susie is trying to see the back of her waist, which is being adjusted by the usually patient elder sister, who also helps, when the work presses.

But notwithstanding that these unpleasant associations of the sewing-room must be, it should be arranged so as to mitigate such miseries, as

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far as possible. It may be remarked just here that, as in the case of the laundry, it is a blessing to be able to shut the work to which the sewing-room is dedicated all off in one place, where strips of woollen stuff, or muslin, will not be trailed on the stairs, or loose spools, rolling about, serve as stumbling blocks for those who have never acquired skill on roller-skates.

The door can then be closed on the whirr of the sewing-machine, if it should be the sort that whirrs; upon the discussions, upbraidings and protests that may occur, should there be great provocation; enabling the affairs of the house to move on without interruption — with no reminder as to what is going on, except the appearance of the sewing woman at the luncheon table, or at dinner, when that meal is quite informal.

I know of just one sewing-room that can be called a truly inviting place — that is, for a sewing-room, which must always be judged by a standard of its own. It must be plainly stated, however, that the mistress of *that* house never makes mistakes. She never cuts a waist — a bod-

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ice, as our English cousins say, and perhaps more correctly — wrong side out, or upside down. Her “creations” are never experimental. When she unrolls her material, having a clear, practical mind, she knows just what she means to do, and does it. Nobody ever sobbed in *her* sewing-room. Nothing ever came out of it that was not perfection — artistic, graceful, tasteful perfection. Whether it was an evening gown for Katherine, or a “Brownie” suit for little Henry, it was all the same; there was nothing that she could not make and make well, for she could measure things “to a thread,” and knew every hieroglyphic on the patterns, of whatsoever name, number or description.

Her sewing-room was at the back of the house. The floor was of polished wood, without so much as a rug; the walls pale yellow like hazy sunshine; a wardrobe let into a recess had both shelves and drawers. There was a good folding mirror, in which you could see not only the front of a gown but the lines in the back of the waist.

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The "form" — a convenience that cannot be dispensed with, however much it may be objected to, and justly, on aesthetic grounds — occupied a secluded nook all to itself, when its services were not required. The cutting table was of oak with a smooth covering of dark green oil-cloth. Upon a small side-table, always in readiness, was a small gas stove for heating flatirons. In this model sewing-room the purely ornamental had not been forgotten. There were photographic copies of good pictures upon the walls; the chairs were low — except the one at the sewing-machine — and were, of course, without arms. An ample waste-basket held the scraps and ravellings that were never allowed to accumulate under foot. There was also, at all times, thread of all kinds, buttons, hooks and eyes, tape and other staples, with pins and needles, bought by the gross, in their own drawers, always ready when needed. The windows commanded cheerful views of garden and shrubbery. All the leading authorities on frills and furbelows were filed and placed where they could be conveniently consulted. The

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presiding genius of this sewing-room was what we now call "an old-fashioned mother." While she wished her daughters to be clever, accomplished women — as they were —; to enjoy their brief youth in all pleasant, rational ways; at the same time, she insisted that they should be well grounded in the domestic arts. Fortunately they agreed with her and willingly accepted instruction at her hands and from the skilled seamstress who came twice yearly for a fortnight's engagement. The daughters were teachable and worked with a will, becoming proficient in all the mysteries of making buttonholes, overcasting, shirring, and the like. The machine hummed steadily under their active young feet, and the regular semi-annual sewing season had a quality of cheerfulness which was almost gaiety in that house which I do not recall elsewhere. That sewing-room was remarkable for another unique characteristic — it was about the only one I have ever known that was not avoided by the men of the family; for it is well understood that the superior sex has an inbred love of comfort, like



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that of feline creatures who always find a cozy corner and a soft cushion.

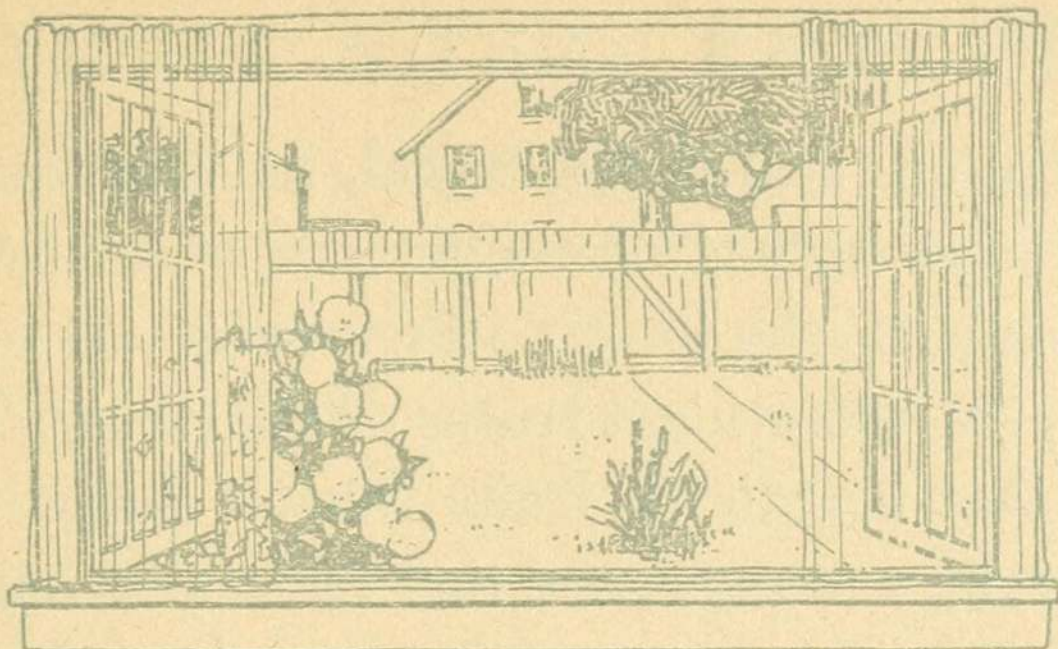
The father would look in as he passed the door on his way down-town, and the brothers could be heard, when they came home, running upstairs, interested in what was going on, ready to admire and criticize, offering opinions that were never despised and were sometimes even accepted.

In this family, endowed with only moderate means, the daughters were always well dressed, and had many simple, pretty gowns because they could make them themselves, much more tastefully and skilfully than could the average dress-maker. They expected to do it, and — because they had been well taught and knew how, without costly mistakes and disappointing experiments — it was to them thoroughly congenial work. Of course, having had practical experience, when at some later time they can afford to hire their gowns made, or supervise a sewing-room in their own houses, they will be able to plan and arrange the sewing in the way which is always such

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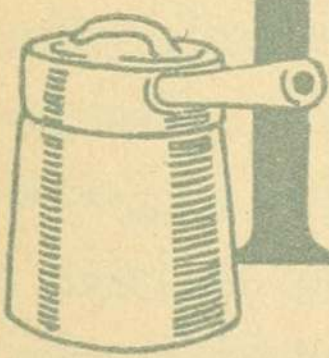
a saving of time and is so helpful to the seamstress, leaving her to devote her energy to more particular and important things. This, of course, provided — that that important person does not insist on being a dictator, and is gracious enough to allow her patrons to have what they like, since they know their own minds and expect to wear the clothes themselves.

What they have learned in their mother's sewing-room will stay with them through life, to be imparted to their daughters after them. Home work and hand-work, when well done, will always have a peculiar value, and it will be a long time before ready-made clothing will be universally worn, the key turned in the lock of the sewing-room door, and the seamstress, imbued with the spirit of the age, left free to follow what she mistakenly believes to be "a higher vocation."



## XVII

### Euphemia's Bower



**I**N the Middle West, especially the states along the Ohio River, there has been an enormous invasion of negroes across the border from Kentucky and Tennessee and even further south. This has not been altogether deplored by the white residents of these states. There are some thousands who, realizing that they are not much worse off than they were before, are very apt to say to their Northern sisters, "*Now* you will see for yourselves"; and their Northern sisters are seeing.

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There are still in the world, notwithstanding the gradual spread of enlightenment, many sincere persons who have no knowledge of, or belief in, the self-evident truths of ethnology. They think that hereditary traits can be changed, or effaced, by a miracle, and that racial peculiarities disappear with a change in surroundings and the distribution of leaflets. There has been an immense advance in the regions named, within the past ten years, a growing disposition to make the best of apparently fixed conditions and not to expect the impossible. The colored maid-of-all-work, with few exceptions, since her emigration north, has become a law unto herself. She arranges her own hours, with increasingly long periods of recreation. While she likes to have a room in the house where she is employed, for her personal convenience, that she may stop in, if the weather is bad, or she feels indisposed to go abroad, she prefers to live elsewhere. By this arrangement she comes to get the breakfast at any hour she likes, or not at all; and she has the great advantage of being out of sight upon the

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advent of guests, or during other domestic irregularities. She can be neither restrained nor influenced. In southern Ohio, Indiana and Illinois she has taken the place, almost wholly, of her white predecessor, who has gone to the factory or shop because she has her evenings, holidays and Sundays, and because she escapes the odium of being called a servant.

Of course, in the factory or shop, the earnings are small, the employee must pay board and room rent, unless she lives at home — in which case she helps support the family and can save still less. Those who are left for the kitchen are decidedly *not* a saving remnant, or in any sense, a survival of the fittest.

The old rule of one afternoon, and a part of alternate Sundays off, or every Sunday off, and nightly retiring to be not later than ten o'clock, is a dead letter in the domestic code.

In most cases Euphemia, as well as her colored sister, hurries through her tasks that she may don the large pearl-colored hat and braided walking dress that she is buying on the instalment plan, to

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promenade the streets up to the very latest second that will enable her to rush home and broil a beefsteak — or fry it, if she dare. She is not really in the least a domestic character, and has not the slightest vestige of attachment to locality. She enjoys rapid change — scooping up the miscellaneous strewings of misshapen shoes, strings, picture-cards and garments, throwing them into her big trunk with various articles which she has acquired by right of discovery, jumping up and down on the bulging lid, snapping the key in the lock and engaging in coquetish persiflage with the expressman who hauls it to the next place. During this hegira Euphemia thinks complacently of the pale blue silk blouse and the five-dollar gold piece which was given her at Christmas for services not rendered, and turns her back upon the vacated den to seek another, without a pang of regret. “Den” is not used in this connection as a common term meant to describe the workroom of a literary toiler.

She leaves behind her strange, musty odors of

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stale food and cheap perfume, and if she is *very* advanced, of cigarettes, with scraps of pie left under her pillow, and other remnants of nocturnal refreshment.

Since this description has not been exaggerated, "and naught set down in malice," the question may be asked, why trouble about Euphemia's bower? *She* does not care for it; she will not keep it tidy; why not, then, devote all one's energies to making it safe? To this end the eminently practical mind will suggest a tiled or concrete floor, and walls and ceilings of corrugated iron to avert danger of fire from matches or the light which burns all night; an iron bedstead, indestructible toilet articles, and chairs that will resist the roughest handling.

There are well-meaning humanitarians who waste much sympathy on the cheerless quarters that are sometimes assigned Euphemia. Without wishing to subject myself to charges of heartlessness, I am forced to declare that, it is, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, sympathy wasted. Euphemia does not care for ornament-

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ation, except pictures that she has cut from the comic page of the Sunday newspapers, or tintype groups of herself and "Johnny," taken in a booth at a street fair.

I once studied, with much profit, an illustration in a woman's magazine. It was satirical. Edith, the young bride, had begun housekeeping — innocent creature — with the firm intention that Euphemia should have everything in the way of possible "uplift." She began her labors with all the enthusiasm of youth and fatuous hope. Pretty dotted muslin curtains veiled the lower panes of the windows in Euphemia's room; pots of blooming plants stood in a row along the upper sash; there was a rocking chair with a cushion, a draped dressing table with a mirror such as Edith would perhaps have chosen for herself. This was Scene I. In Scene II Euphemia had been in possession for a fortnight and a day, and had then left abruptly. It was a tableau of destruction with Edith weeping over the ruins. Of the blooming plants but a few dried sticks remained; the filmy sash curtains had been jerked down for a better



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view of the back premises and the garbage man, while the cracks in the mirror resembled pictures of lightning. And this is precisely what happens in almost every instance, as the lady lecturer on domestic science, who believes firmly in the "onward" movement, would have discovered if she had not always lived in hotels. Of course, it would be a bitter disappointment to her, as it was to Edith, whose aims were sincere and high.

However, there is no need to despair, even in the face of such disappointment many times repeated, although evolution may be both progressive and retrogressive.

In New Zealand there once existed a powerful bird, taller than a giraffe, with legs as huge and strong as those of a cart-horse. It was the wingless *Dinornis*. It disappeared so recently that fragments of eggs have been discovered within the memory of the present generation. This leads ornithologists to hope that living specimens will yet be found in the unexplored and southernmost island of the group.

So there may be some unexplored region in

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which are yet living good Euphemias who have mated with their kind and reared children with whom we shall one day be brought face to face.

I myself have seen three such — and there may be others. In spite of my strictures upon maids of color, I must confess that two of these paragons were negroes. The first was named Azalee. She had entered the high school with excellent grades. Her penmanship was far, far better than my own. She spoke excellent English, and she was fond of reading. She was quick, orderly, skilful in all things. She kept her room in exquisite order, and she was loved and respected in the family where she lived. Her comfort was considered and provided for, and she was allowed to take the books and magazines and keep them as long as she liked. Possessing dignity and self-respect — tiny creature that she was — she never abused her privileges.

The other exception, also colored, was uneducated, and not so acutely conscientious as Azalee, but competent to an astonishing degree. She, also, took an intense pride in her room, which she

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cleaned thoroughly once a week and dusted daily. It was, in her opinion, quite as nice "as any of the young ladies' rooms." In the amazing eight years of her occupancy, she acquired — and lawfully — considerable personal property — not only the ordinary possessions, but two silk dresses and money in the bank. She had one weakness — doting affection for a coal-black cat which she permitted to sleep in the centre of her snow-white counterpane, possibly enjoying the pleasing contrast.

The third was an American, the daughter of a well-to-do farmer. She became discontented at home, where she washed and ironed, baked and brewed, swept and dusted, milked and churned, for no wages at all, and received only the scantiest and commonest clothing in exchange for constant drudgery, while her brothers, for far less work, had their horses and buggies and their share of all the crops harvested on the place. She liked the steam heat and the electric light of the city house, and she, too, had a taste for good reading which she was allowed to gratify, and

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far better manners than many a society leader. She, also, excelled in fine needlework, in hemstitching, drawn-work and embroidery, and in this profitable occupation she spent the greater part of her leisure with no one to intrude upon the privacy which was permitted her, after her mistress's work was done.

She was given many privileges in the house because she, too, never presumed upon favors shown her. She came and went as she liked, because she never left the house with work neglected or undone. She saw her friends, and was appealed to on questions where her opinion was desired and valued. She never wished to intrude in the family councils and knew that she could not wait at table and at the same time "eat with the family."

Little Azalee still blesses the household of which she is the guardian angel — and her mistress is envied of all her acquaintances — the little negro maid so loyal and grateful that no offer of higher wages and lighter labor can lure her from her allegiance. Rosabella has set up

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housekeeping on her own account; and the last mentioned has sought a wider and easier field — in a hotel.

While presenting these three rare and cherished examples, hosts of “those others” rise to my mind’s eye — a sort of closely-welded human chain. One only — because of her marked and peculiar gifts — shall be mentioned — German Barbara, the dependent employee of an indulgent mistress in an Ohio town.

The furnace being inadequate to heat the entire house, Barbara was entreated to keep a fire in her room in cold weather, a good stove and an abundance of fuel being supplied her. Aprons, collars and handkerchiefs were bestowed upon her in a perfect linen shower.

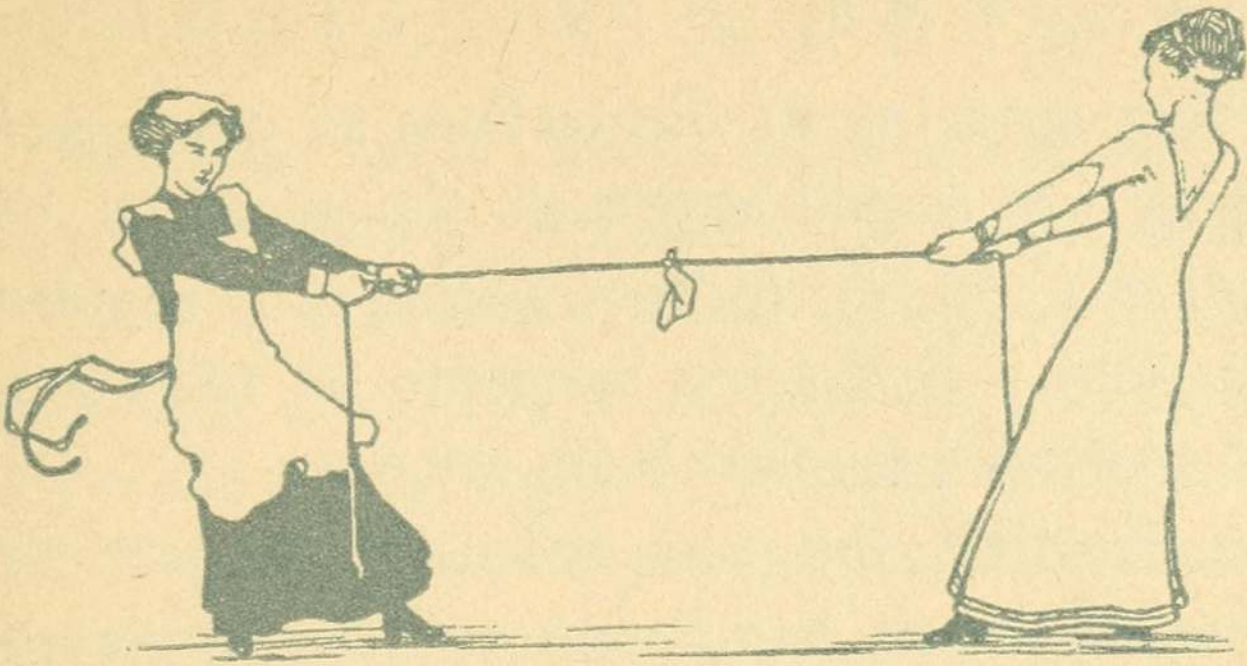
She came faltering to her mistress one day, with genuine wet, glistening tears streaming down her cheeks, and her voice choked with grief. She had just received news of her father’s death in Germany and must go at once because of legal difficulties in settling his estate which made her presence absolutely necessary. Her room was

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stripped of everything that could be of service to her on the stormy voyage across the Atlantic in January. She was loaded with additional gifts — warm stockings and petticoats, which she accepted with more emotion. Then she took leave of her sympathetic employer and went — just around the corner, to a new place!

She has since married and if there is truth in heredity, her progeny will be the shining literary and histrionic lights of the oncoming generation.

Barbara's talents were cruelly wasted in the kitchen; she would have shone behind the footlights in great emotional parts. She was a treasure lost to melodrama in "The Burglar's Bride," or "The Bank Wrecker's Daughter." How she would have wept and implored "on bended knees" in one of those thrilling compositions in which there is a real saw-mill. It is assuredly not in schools of dramatic art that the syndicate should search for genius, but in Euphemia's bower — or Barbara's; for though the names are different, the principle remains the same.



## XVIII

### Mistress and Maid

**T**HERE are irreconcilable differences among human beings. A Protectionist of the straitest sect will never be convinced that tariff reduction is not tantamount to political and industrial ruin. The Free Trader is as certain that the tariff is a tax paid out of the consumer's pocket. The convert to Predestination considers the advocate of Free Will mistaken if not lost, while the liberal minded and those holding other theological views pity and wonder at both.

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From an array of illustrations so grave and weighty one should approach the relations of Euphemia and her mistress, perhaps, by regular gradations. But some moments of reflection have convinced me that there are none.

In treating the comprehensive subject of power, Emerson has shown us how opposing forces struggle ceaselessly for supremacy: the strong animal fighting and winning the mastery of the herd; the new boy contending for his rightful place in school; the born ruler impressing his fellow-men with the courage that inspires them to follow him to the death.

The kitchen is another arena in which the measuring of wills goes on ceaselessly.

Euphemia arrives to reconnoitre. She wants to know what is *not* to be done. She wears her best clothes, the large hat and the red cloak which she thinks give her an air of distinction. Her mien is resolute and severe, and in her preliminary remarks she uses the largest words she knows.



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She seats herself, looks her would-be superior over and mentally decides: "*She* hain't much."

If she perceives physical weakness, timidity or moral cowardice, if she has an inkling that there are young ladies or sickness in the house; that for some necessary cause there are meals to be served at irregular hours, she becomes still more bold and stern.

She asks questions like these:

"Do you have dinner at six o'clock?"

"Who scrubs the porches?"

"Is the washing done out?"

"Do you keep a man?"

"How much time can I have off?"

And there is not a single "ma'am" in the whole category.

Well for the mistress — perhaps — if these questions can be answered in the negative or affirmative, as Euphemia wishes and expects them to be answered. If so, and there is, in addition, a complete surrender of the supposedly master mind, a meek resolve not to cross her, or vex her, or ask more of her than can be avoided, all may

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go well. This, however, should not be expected as a fixed certainty. With the vast majority of human beings, most of whom are still far from regeneration, there is an opinion that the more advantage one can take, the more of this world's goods and pleasures he may count upon having.

One who is modest and deferential and considerate simply suffers for his virtues, and the more he concedes the more will be demanded of him. The feminine pronoun may be substituted in this equation — and the answer will remain the same.

Euphemia is only obeying the ruling spirit of the hour; ask for a great deal if you expect anything at all. Fortunately, that rule, like some others, works both ways. The woman who meets the above questions with a boldness that challenges Euphemia's, stands a much better chance of victory than if she met her in a milder and more pacific manner. The days of gentleness are past; it is the era of physical culture, golf, rolled-up sleeves, bare heads and sun-baked complexions; of strenuousness in every walk of

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life. There are no more passages marked "pianissimo" in our national airs.

Edith, therefore, should sit erect, look Euphemia straight in the eye, anticipate her demands if possible; and, though it may seem rude, answer all her questions in a breath without so much as a comma between them: "I have dinner at half past six no one scrubs the porches the washing is sent out I do not keep a man and you can have the usual time off and no more."

Of course there are individuals who could not be dealt with thus, successfully; who would be stampeded at once. She who decamps, under such circumstances, might be just the one long sought for and never found before, which would be sadder than almost any affliction short of bereavement or bankruptcy; but it is much more probable that it is a happy deliverance.

Half the friction between mistress and maid comes from too great expectation on either side.

The mistress, herself, is not infallible. Every day of her life she probably forgets or neglects some pressing duty. She, too, breaks dishes, does

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not know where she has put her eyeglasses, loses her pocket-book, and goes to bed without turning out the light in the library. She forgets that the coffee is out and sends her husband to his office with a depressing cup of tea, instead. Of course she does not — in those sad hours when she is struggling against the powers of dirt single-handed — stuff the best table-cloth under the sink, wipe up the kitchen floor with a damask napkin and throw silver spoons in the garbage. But she expects Euphemia to be a person of flawless memory, which would make her — not a humble employee — or, anyhow, an employee — but an intellectual prodigy. If she could always remember, if she possessed unfailing skill, foresight, great intelligence, as has been already remarked, she would not be spending her days in anybody's kitchen. She is there through stress of perhaps pitiful and tragic circumstances; through lack of high qualities; because she is what she is. Were she something more, she might be a lady clerk, a stenographer, a teacher, an editor, or a physician. Though, so far as

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that goes, she doubtless prepares a much better meal, keeps her kitchen in better order, than could many a teacher, no matter how competent, or a physician, no matter how learned.

In this connection I remember that one of the most cheerless homes I have ever known was that of a successful teacher, and one of the worst meals I have ever tried to eat was set forth upon the table by a woman physician, who knew all the evil effects of bad cookery.

“Followers” *are* objectionable; but Euphemia is young. She has that love of companionship which is natural in normal youth, and that desire for the attentions of the opposite sex which is just as natural. If her mistress can see no charm in “Tom,” or “Charley,” or “Johnny,” who shuffles his feet and looks sheepish when she comes in upon them, in the midst of their confidences, she should reflect that she does not see the young swain as Euphemia sees him, or know him as she knows him — the generous giver of “mixed candy,” of strong scents in bottles marked “perfume,” or as the gallant escort on

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Fourth of July excursions, or to the "op'ry," as Euphemia designates the entertainment at the ten, fifteen and twenty-five cent theatres. She is a creature of few resources. But for her chosen familiars, she would have many long hours of dull solitude. For to her, the whole wide realm of books may have no existence, and, often, she is a stranger in a strange land.

Many well-born, well-educated women have no power of reasonable command; they lay down the law in the voice of insolence and with an eye that either freezes or scorches. Often they are quite unconscious of their objectionable manner. A successful teacher was once asked why her pupils so rarely disobeyed her.

"Because," she said, "I rarely ever command. I request, and with a politeness I would show an equal."

With the fault of insolence, unconscious or premeditated, there is often another — a sure promoter of discord. This is an inability to know one's mind; the habit of changing orders — of taking Euphemia from one thing before it

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is half finished, to begin, possibly, two or three others. This would vex and distract the most well disposed. The fact should not be lost sight of, as has been said, that Euphemia is not a person of strong intellect. No one can do good work in any calling who ventures half a dozen things at once, and certainly not Euphemia, who can scarcely write her name.

“I must have my work done in *my* way,” is the arbitrary dictum of the mistress who calls Euphemia from scrubbing the kitchen floor or blacking the stove, to prepare the luncheon for unexpected guests whom she has brought home with her from a committee meeting at the club.

“Then do it yourself,” Euphemia will answer, if she is a young woman of spirit, as will all her successors to the end of the chapter. What just person who has ever known the unpleasantness of such a lack of system can blame them?

Consideration — the ability to put herself in another’s place on the part of the mistress — would do much to win Euphemia’s loyalty and good-will, if she is not entirely destitute of

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these characteristics. They are not possessed by all. There are among the serving classes, occasionally, as among the served, a rapacity and lawlessness that are beyond control.

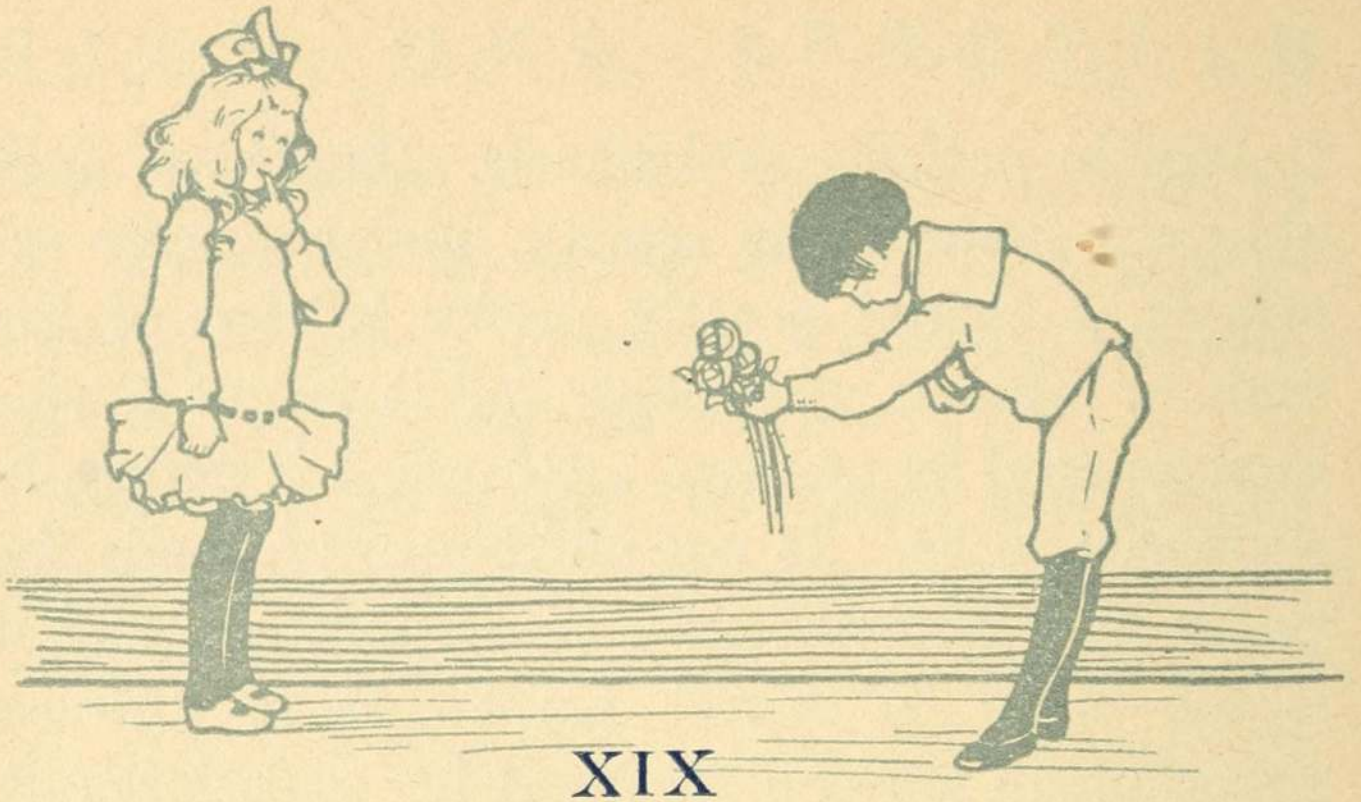
There are few women, no matter how competent and clear-headed, who can endure to have people about while they are in the kitchen cooking. Yet it is expected that Euphemia, who understands her business — sometimes — shall preserve her equanimity when she is interfered with; or being supervised as she sifts the flour or peels the potatoes, or being taught a new way of beating eggs, or being stopped while moulding pastry or stirring the cake, which she knows will turn out all right — faith that has always been well grounded.

There are mistresses who do not want to interfere; who are only too glad to let well enough alone; but they are not much more numerous than Euphemias of flawless memory and extraordinary intellect. There is a name for unreasonable meddling and petty fault-finding — “nagging.” Of all small vices it is the hardest



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to bear in patience and silence. There are amiable criminals whose society, under proper restraint, I should greatly prefer to that of the man or woman who nags, for it is not a vice monopolized by one sex, although it is generally supposed to be. It not unfrequently goads the polite and long-suffering to desperation, and it is too much to expect Euphemia to exercise superhuman self-control where her superiors fail. There is a wide difference between a firm and persistent enforcement of orders, and perpetual bickering, and wise is she who has come to a realization of this.



XIX

## Small Politenesses

**V**IEWED from a purely selfish standpoint, quite aside from any considerations of kindness and good nature, there is nothing more thoroughly profitable than politeness. There are few who are not immediately sensible of the influence of courtesy. The curmudgeon who snaps and snarls, the insolent and the too familiar — all may be kept within bounds by simple good manners that scorn to return incivility in kind. It is a soft but impenetrable garment, against which the shafts of

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the vulgar and violent fall powerless. When the mistress enters the verbal arena with Euphemia, meeting her crude insolence with railing and upbraiding, she is pitting herself against an antagonist who can outdo her in volume and in the vocabulary of abuse and who has, in addition, the callousness of a crustacean — which has been graphically described as “a creature all shell and claws.”

But the minor rules of politeness, which are the very essence of the best home life, do not apply altogether to Euphemia. They are far less a matter of words than of deeds. The basis of perfect good manners is always unselfishness — which is a truism. One of the most reprehensible pieces of bad breeding is irregularity in coming to one's meals. The breakfast is kept waiting until some member of the family chooses to appear, after late rising. Dinner is delayed until the soup is cold, and the joint is sodden, because Charles wishes to drop in at his club for half an hour on his way home, or Annabel prolongs her call on a friend, thereby delaying the friend's dinner, also.

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To dawdle over food at table is another form of bad manners that should be punished by solitary confinement and a diet of bread and water. Who did not rejoice in the righteous wrath of the incomparable Shirley when she turned the insolent Mr. Donne out of her garden, after having borne with his selfish dilly-dallying over the tea-table, and his silly affectation? But we need not go so far afield for terrible examples, for have we not all sat helpless while Edith pecked at her salad, or Charles verbosely and heavily explained some philosophical platitude, dull as a patent office report?

This is not to be construed as advice "to bolt one's food and run." It is necessary to spend sufficient time at table to do justice to one's food, to masticate it properly, and allow leisure for pleasant and interesting talk. But no one person should detain an entire company, unless it be some extraordinarily interesting individual who is urged to finish the anecdote, or story, with which he has been so fortunate as to entertain them all.

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Another common incivility is to neglect, or postpone beyond all reasonable limits answering letters, and such inquiries in letters as are neither unreasonable nor impertinent. Very often both sorts come with the morning mail, and for these — the unreasonable and the impertinent — silence and the waste-basket are the appointed portion. The model correspondent keeps every letter until it is answered, and places it before her on the desk as she replies, referring to the inquiries it may contain. No one can get the full gist of any letter, however brief, from one reading.

Soiled paper, a slovenly address, the stamp put on crooked, or upside down, shabby bits of paper, a scrawl in pencil, indecipherable — all these call for but one comment — “Alas!” Each fault in the list enumerated indicates hurry — a desire to be through with the business as soon as possible, which is anything but complimentary to the person addressed.

Intolerance and a dictatorial unwillingness “to hear the other side,” are, fortunately, conversational bad manners that are improving as

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we lay less stress on mere partisan politics and irrelevant and unfruitful dogma — the two paramount items that once furnished occasion for prolonged wrangling. Women, especially, are steadily gaining in tolerance and ability to consider questions from an abstract and impersonal standpoint; so much, at any rate, has the office, the discipline of business, and the parliamentary rule of the club accomplished.

But there still exists a type with which we are all more or less familiar, — the person who considers her opinion final upon all questions mundane or super-mundane. So long as her hearers acquiesce or keep still — prudent silence that may irritate but does not provoke — all goes well. But presume to doubt, to offer a counter statement, and the dogmatic one bristles and bridles, flushes and raises her voice, and you regret having spoken, unless you think it time somebody asserted herself, or you are unwilling to sacrifice your inalienable right of free speech.

With the conversational despot, the only permissible talk is the monologue — and the mono-

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logue must be hers — to be heard with suppressed sighs, with no wandering of drowsy eyes, or furtive effort to escape. “Turn about is fair play,” the world over, and the woman who over-indulges in monologue should tolerate it in others; but she rarely does.

One of the most comforting of all politenesses is the habit of returning promptly that which is borrowed, and there are some sacred belongings which should never be asked for at all. I should put at the very head of the list a woman’s thimble and scissors.

“Lend me your thimble,” begs the foolish virgin, who was never known to carry any oil in her lamp. “I want it only half a second.” Thereupon she stirs up her victim’s work-basket, finds the thimble and carries it off to her room. A little later the victim must hurry to the post-box with an important letter and it is necessary, first, to take an unanticipated stitch; the thimble must be gone after, asked for, or hunted for, and brought back. In those few moments of delay the mail is collected, the letter misses the post

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that should have carried it to its destination. Upon this delay may hang innumerable and irreparable disasters.

As for scissors, all women except those who use them chiefly for extracting corks from bottles, hold their scissors, sharp and bright, in a sort of reverential esteem. They would far rather lend their best bonnet than this sacred implement.

To return to the original premise, rudeness, primarily, is selfishness — disregard for the rights and feelings of others. This manifests itself in innumerable forms. The beauty — or, worse still — the person who was once beautiful and imagines that her charms are perennial, is, we will say, one of a house party. She is invariably seated in the pleasantest corner of the verandah; she always has the most comfortable chair. The lion's share of delicacies and privileges fall to her, because she has a highly developed power of appropriation. If she is one of an excursion party she is always found on the shady side of the carriage; she always secures the



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lower berth in the Pullman sleeper, and monopolizes the services of the porter, whom she has probably bribed with an excessive fee, quite beyond the means of her companions.

It is she who takes possession of the toilet room, locks the door, and there dresses herself at leisure, omitting nothing that may be a help to nature — the superfluities that take time and pains. She is not aware, apparently, or she does not care, that mothers with fretful children who want their breakfast, and travellers who must leave the train at the next station are waiting her sovereign pleasure.

In most camping parties there is usually some one such person — the shirk who refuses to do her part, who must be waited on and borne with, who expects all things, and does nothing in return. To such a woman may be traced the disbanding of many a pleasant coterie, in which all but herself had a decent regard for the common weal. She finally becomes a burden too great to be borne, and because of her meanness and her exactions, the pleasure, always so much enjoyed

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but for her, is given up. Of course, the development of such a character began at home. There is many a mother who has a favorite child. By some strange injustice this is rarely, or never, the most obedient and dutiful. It is more frequently the surly, intractable ne'er-do-well, who riots all night and sleeps half the day; the peevish, indolent girl, whom no one ever crosses, for whom everything is put aside, and who is waited on with slavish subservience by all the rest of the household. She has her breakfast in bed, served upon the finest linen and the best china, little luxuries that are permitted no one else. She has the first choice in hats and gowns, and the others must surrender any selection that they may have made, if she is disposed to want it.

Rarely, indeed, does she reward her mother's doting and unjust partiality. It is not to her that the parents will look for care and affection in their old age. Her self-absorbed girlhood, by a natural process of growth, has been a preparation for a maturity in which selfishness has increased and intensified. All the faults of bad

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breeding have multiplied without let or hindrance, until what were, at best, mere rudimentary virtues have disappeared. Old age, filial duty, gratitude, are of less account, even, to the woman of forty than they were to the spoiled and selfish girl in her teens.



XX

## Questions of Detail

**T**HERE are many housekeepers who have an inherent aversion to dirt; under whose roofs are neither moth nor rust, and upon whose shining tables no names may be written by the betraying finger.

Yet, under their rule order does not exist. The work is never done, everything is at sixes and sevens — or at least at twos and threes — a milder form of chaos. There seems to be no stated time for anything, and nothing in its place. The dishes collect from one meal to an-

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other, in the absence of a regular servant, until the array upon the shelves has been exhausted, when a woman, hired by the hour, comes in and "cleans up."

With ordinary people this slackness would attract many kinds of vermin — beetles, mice, ants — but in that clean woman's house it does not. Wash day is a movable feast, — or rather, fast day, — and it may fall on Monday, or Saturday — when it cannot possibly be put off another minute. At the end of this period — before the arrival of the laundress, or before the dispatch of the hamper to her, unless the supply of house linen is limitless, the family is on the shortest practicable allowance. The dinner is served on a cloth which, though spotless, has been a field of practice for all the varieties of patching and darning that could be taught in a German school of needlework. When this state of things comes to pass, it proves that its promoter has "no system" — that she is lacking in the comprehension of details mistakenly considered of little consequence. But, just here lies the differ-

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ence between drudgery and efficiency. In spite of ceaseless effort, the poor unmethodical creature is confronted by rooms never set to rights, meals never on time, the work-basket heaped with accumulations of mending, waiting some future convenience that will never be more convenient than the present. Every emergency takes her unawares. She is never prepared, and one imagines that she must have been one of those unfortunates born out of due season.

And yet, with a very little planning, the whole *ménage* could be reconstructed by one simple rule: have a stated time for doing every daily task and try to do it at that time. An absolutely unalterable law cannot be fixed, for every house may be disturbed at any moment, and without warning, by accident, sudden illness, or death, and at such time all else is lost sight of. But these are rare and exceptional circumstances. Most lives move on monotonously through many years, with little change from day to day.

Where there are daughters, each should be given her task, and it should be changed each

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week, until she has done all the work about the house that the housekeeper should know, and then the cycle should begin again.

In families where no two members are alike in looks, manners or character, there is usually one who shirks, no matter how industrious the others may be. If her unwillingness does not come from physical weakness or incapacity, or if it is not one of those strange maladies that prevent her from using the broom or dust-brush, should there be no servants in the house, while she is still able to attend three receptions in one afternoon and dance all night, she should be held inexorably to her stint.

Two or three intelligent, energetic girls, each going to her duty as soon as she has finished breakfast, can put a house in beautiful order within an hour; can prepare a palatable meal, can so expedite the sewing that the visitation of the seamstress can be appreciably shortened. But this is possible only where there is fair and honest co-operation. In some households may be found one uncomplaining girl upon whom is

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put all the labor that nobody else will perform. She does all the cooking when Euphemia leaves; nobody else can bake the cake, make the pudding and jam and jelly. She does all the mending, and darns all the stockings "because she does not mind it." It is elaborately explained that Sarah does not care for dress, or society, or visiting, or any of the recreations every normal girl should enjoy with all the zest that comes only in fleeting and enthusiastic youth. They do not know what wistful desires, what thwarted hopes are hidden deep within her heart, because she is too proud to complain, or to ask for the appreciation that is withheld. The family, who leave more and more of the work to her, who heap it on her patient shoulders, have many endearing names for her — "good old girl" — "dear Sarah" — but their affection expends itself in affectionate expressions, never in lessening her labor.

The difference between good and bad house-keeping is not always pronounced. It may be often the merest shade, and this entirely per-



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taining to matters of detail. One may often go into a room that has been well swept, well dusted, and thoroughly well aired; no flecks of lint are blowing about, the back rungs of the chairs have had the most conscientious attention; the vases have been emptied and scrupulously washed; everything has been moved on the mantel, and last weeks' newspapers carried to the attic. Yet the room does not seem tidy. A glance betrays the secret: nothing has been put back quite in its place; the rug is just a trifle askew; the shades have been carelessly drawn; some of the curtains are looped, or partially looped, while others hang straight.

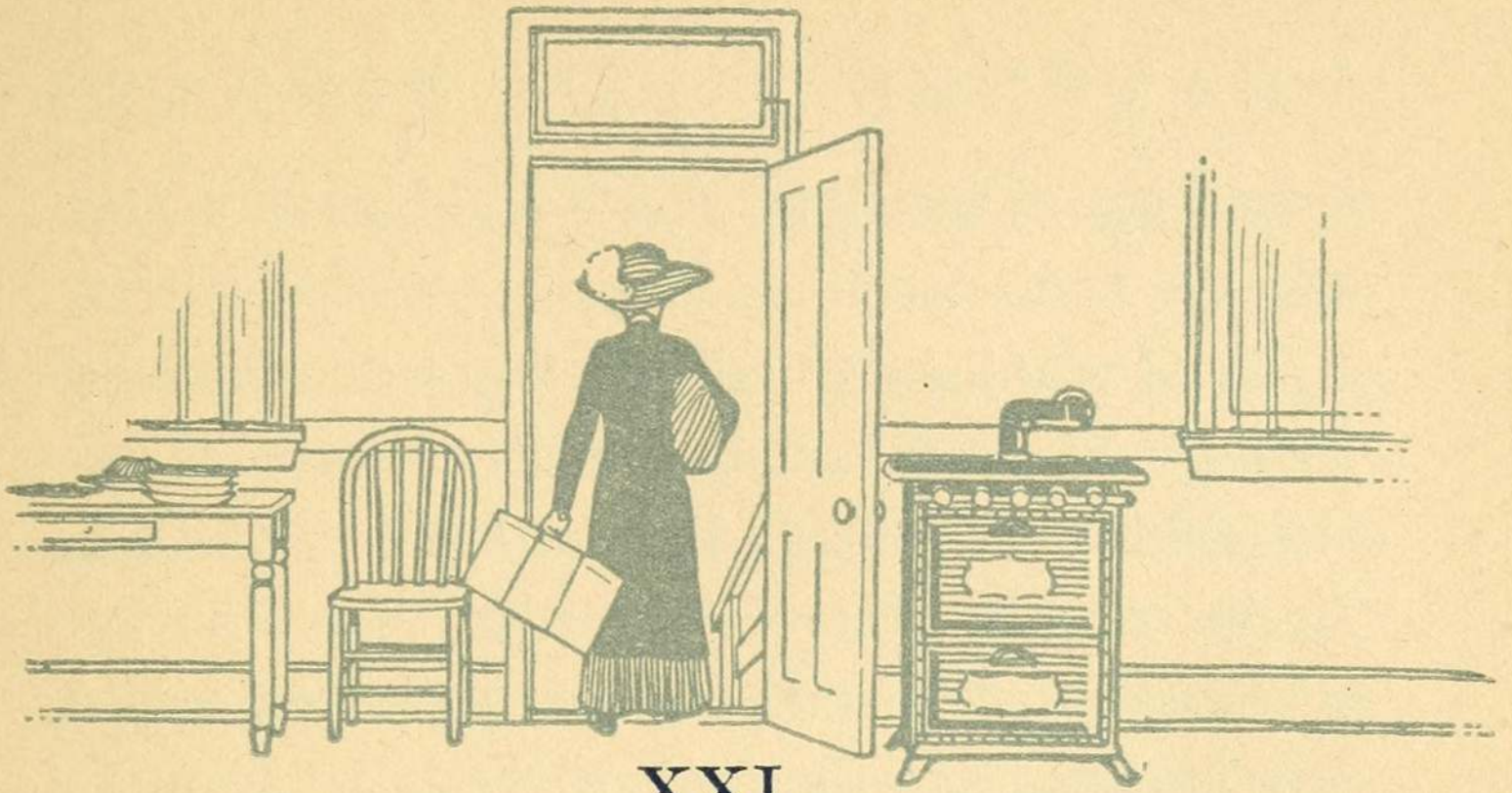
Yet no one can truthfully say that Euphemia has not handled her broom painstakingly, or has left behind her accumulations that should be removed. But one must go over the house after her, a touch here, a little rearrangement there — all accomplished in a few minutes — and the room smiles again, breathing once more its accustomed air of taste and neatness.

It does not detract from the nutritive quali-

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ties of the beefsteak — given proper broiling — if the platter is put on the table obliquely. One's hunger will be appeased with food that is wholesome and well cooked, even if the knives and forks have been flung down with no regard to orderly arrangement. But it is by such disregard of details that the hand of the tyro may be seen.

It is not enough to be clean, to be capable, to be willing; to these must be added, if the house is really well kept, the cultivated sense of arrangement, which can refine the humblest surroundings, and without which even luxury and beauty are cheapened and destroyed.



XXI

## Euphemia's Unrest

**W**HO can explain why Euphemia is not happy? Never has so much been done for her physical well-being. Her predecessors, of a former generation, employed in the city, had to do their work in cold houses. Fires were kept going in the bedrooms in open grates, the bars of which had to be frequently black-leaded. Water was carried into all these rooms in heavy cans; feather-beds were in general use, which had to be shaken and turned — very different from the easy airing and

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smoothing of mattress, sheets and blankets, nowadays.

There was the regular Monday wash-day. with ironing on Tuesday, and neither wringer nor stationary washtubs to lighten labor and lifting. In the country there were still fewer conveniences. Water for all purposes was often carried in a bucket from the foot of the hill. It was a great advance when wells and cisterns were dug. There was a great deal of company — in the West, at least — for this reminiscence does not deal with Southern homes and slave labor — and few meals were served at which neighbors, relatives or passing strangers were not present. In the homely phraseology of the pioneer fathers and mothers, “the latch-string was always out.” There was the midsummer cooking for an army of harvest hands and threshers, with the spinning and weaving, the “slaughtering” in the early winter, with its curing of hams and “head-cheese” and sausage-making. But it was all by way of wholesome, if strenuous, exercise, and it made the good, old-fashioned servant what she

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was — faithful and self-respecting — a woman who expected to live in one place until she married or died, in the latter event to be buried in the family lot. She was in a very intimate sense one of the family. The children were also, to a certain extent, her charge. Not even the mother was more deeply concerned in their welfare, their training and education, and their success after they left the home, and she, too, welcomed them back with open arms — them and their children — on their visits to the old home.

Today Euphemia finds herself in a modern house abounding in every manner of modern convenience. There are no carpets to be swept, taken up and put down again; there is a gas range in the kitchen; the whole house is heated by steam and lighted by electricity, and there is a man to do the heavy labor, and no laundry work is done at home. She has, very often, a pleasant room which is warm in winter and cool in summer; there is a bath, hot and cold water on every floor. Screens keep out the flies; she has linoleum on the kitchen floor which does away

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with too much "wiping up." There is a butler's pantry to which the dishes may be removed from the dining-room just beyond; where glass, silver and china may be washed and placed on dresser shelves along the wall, within reach. She has a bureau of her own, a closet with hooks and drawers; she can buy all manner of things on the instalment plan, from enlarged photographs to a couch covered with Brussels carpet. She reads the newspaper regularly in the morning, if she, herself, is an early riser, before any of the family have seen it, and she has unrestricted use of the ten-cent magazines — which is all the current literature she cares for. She also has instruction at the cooking school and the advantages of night classes in shirt-waist making and millinery at the Y. W. C. A., for which her mistress very often pays. But all this does not develop either a contented or a willing spirit.

As human beings are constituted, this is nothing remarkable. Instead of regarding Euphemia as a strange and unpleasant differentiation of her sex and species, why not accept her, with

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all her imperfections on her head as, willingly or unwillingly, we must?

Are not we, of a supposedly higher class, — better educated, trained and cultured — fast becoming a race of nomads? It is now a fixed belief amongst hundreds of sober-minded people that it is far better “not to own a home.” The payment of a growing variety of taxes and the ruinous expense of repairs are thereby avoided. If a home is unfortunately acquired it must not be so good that it cannot be closed at a moment’s notice while the family flit to Florida, California or Europe, or start on a year’s tour around the world. It must have no inherited or accumulated treasures of books, pictures or bric-a-brac which the enterprising burglar might load into a wagon waiting in the alley at the back gate, in broad daylight, and carry away.

And is there not, in towns and cities everywhere, a ceaseless migration from flat to boarding-house, from boarding-house to hotel and back to flat again? The lady who moved seventeen times in one month is no figment of a satirist’s

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disordered fancy; she still lives, though it may pass belief.

With the instability of our habitations has come an extravagance in eating, drinking, dressing and entertaining, that has infected every class of society.

Our older relatives remember perfectly a halcyon time when one's best bonnet was expected to last more than one season. Now, there must be a new one with the return of spring, summer, autumn and winter, and for that recent invention the "half season," in between.

In the days when we wore plain hats or bonnets, as we were young or old, we ate good plain food; plain pound cake, little scalloped cookies, small, crisp, brown doughnuts sprinkled with powdered sugar, and "floating island" for desert.

Now, the bill of fare is one long array of rissoles, croquettes and patés, of intricate salads enriched with nuts and fruits, cakes compounded of creams, icings, fruits and "filling," and confectionery, into the composition of which have



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gone countless ingredients and flavors. Yet we point to the disappearance of pie from the American table as evidence of a more wholesome taste.

The allurements that take men and women from home have also multiplied beyond all computing. For the husband and father there are the club, politics, the lodge, and the lobby of the hotel; for the wife and daughters, the club, all the ramifications of charities that the church has devised, morning lectures on domestic science and on household economics, the civic federation, and the societies auxiliary to men's secret organizations whose humble part it is to enjoy the patronage of the real orders and give fairs and socials for raising funds. In addition to these there are readings innumerable on art and literature, travel classes, concerts and matinées. Where is the woman who professes "to be anybody at all," who is not forced to keep an engagement book; to consult it every day and send out acceptances or regrets — few, indeed, of the latter — as promptly and methodically as the lighting and fuel companies present their bills?

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Not only are the elders provided lavishly with substitutes for homes, but it has now been necessary for school boards to build and furnish social centres for the boys and girls of high schools where they may meet for the amusement and recreation no longer obtainable under their parents' roofs. In college, the upkeep of fraternity houses has also become an important item in the cost of a modern education. With their evenings for dancing, and "smokers," these houses have superseded the rooms in halls, or in still more hum-drum private families.

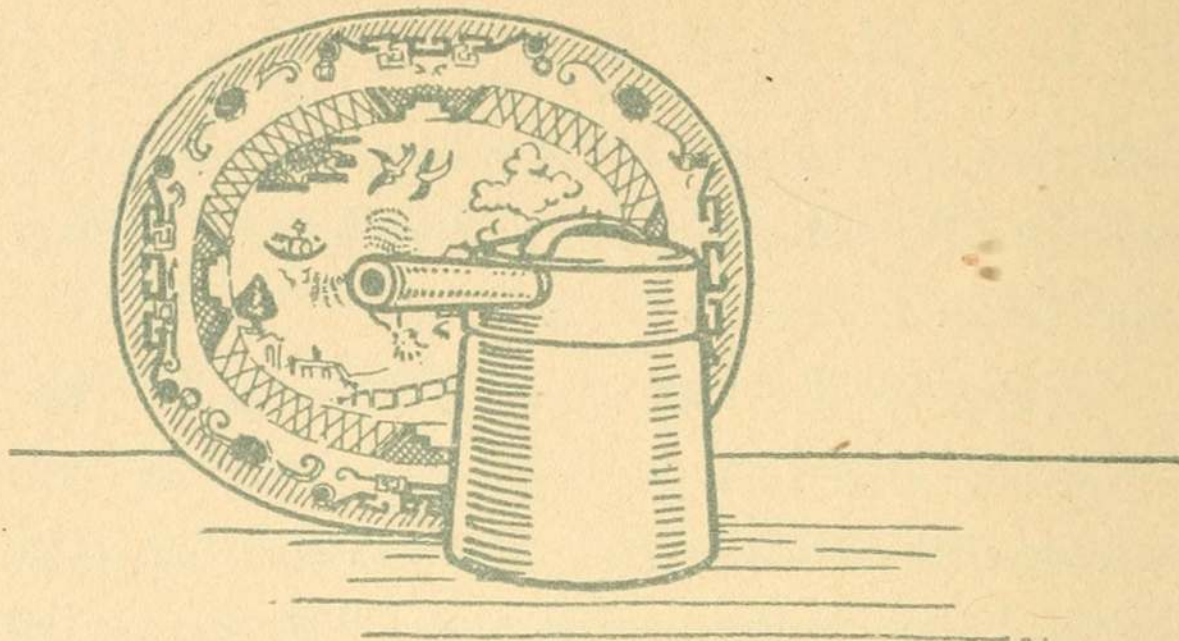
Why, therefore, shall Euphemia be blamed if, in her blind and imperfect way, and in shoes several sizes too small and a belt that fearfully compresses her thick waist, she, too, is trying to "keep up with the procession" — to quote the graphic language of the paragrapher? Her restless haunting of the main thoroughfares every afternoon instead of once a week, as was formerly the rule; her frantic conflicts at bargain counters; her interpretations of extreme fashions in cheap materials, are the natural results of ex-

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amples constantly before her, furnished by those whom she admires and envies and whose equal she feels herself to be.

Then, if she has availed herself of the public schools, she has learned to read in romances where other maids, in positions similar to her own, have been wooed and won by capitalists and promoters, and have risen to the dignity of keeping a carriage and a scrupulously revised visiting-list. She is not the only example of aspiring mediocrity. Mediocrity everywhere aspires and climbs, not for any spiritual or intellectual betterment, but for the accomplishment of purely sordid ends.

There is no sincere desire for the simple life. If there were, we should have it.



## XXII

# Conclusion



**I**T is the changeless law of human development that mankind shall strive ceaselessly toward some ideal of perfection. Thus it gains much which, if not precisely what was sought, is still of lasting value.

The ambition to better one's temporal condition is general, though it admits of countless interpretations. There are always men and women of unquenchable hope and of boundless energy, firm in the conviction that they will succeed where thousands have failed. It is well for us

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that this is true; if it were not we should still be dwelling in caves, clad in skins.

Among these sanguine souls are the undiscouraged young people who have decided to share each other's fortunes, and who have no aspiration towards hotels or boarding-houses, but who look forward "to settling in a home of their own."

It is a beautiful aspiration, natural as the instinct of nesting birds. They plan the appointments of their snuggerly to the last spoon, and see throughout a long, tranquil future only sweetness and light; order, peace, exquisite meals for two, perfect little dinners for their friends, a drawing-room wherein no dust will ever gather and where the flowers will be always fresh. They see in their innocent dreams a rosy-cheeked housemaid in the prettiest of aprons, who does not regard her very becoming cap as a degrading badge of servitude.

No account is taken by the innocent dreamers of the unexpected which always happens and of the expected which seldom does. They cannot foresee the toil and weariness, the disappoint-

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ment, that lie in wait, that will not diminish until the last task drops from the stiffening fingers of old age when death has touched them. In the glamour of their youth, of their unclouded faith, there is no thought of the tribulations that will vex them, and can be escaped by no known powers of strategy or evasion.

Charles is all devotion; he has spoken, thus far, only in dulcet tones. His wish to please has prompted him to appear only in his best and at his best. How can Edith even faintly imagine him comfortably slouching about the house in loose, shapeless slippers, in shabby smoking jacket, indifferent to appearances?

And Charles, in his sentimental musings, has no conception of the lovely Edith in a dressing sack and curl-papers, perhaps a little irritable and unable to appreciate his humor. Yet it probably will come to this, unless they are very exceptional young people indeed. Where Charles now hangs upon Edith's slightest word, he will answer absent-mindedly from behind his newspaper; or, being absorbed in the market reports

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or the account of the football match, he will not hear and will not answer at all.

And what passes belief, if they are really sensible young people, having taken each other for worse, as well as for better, when this prosaic stage is reached they will not lapse into selfish indifference and decide that their whole romance has been a mistake and that marriage is a failure. They will realize that they have simply grown used to each other; that if they can appear in every-day attire, talk or keep silent, it is because they have settled down into a rational, un-sentimental comradeship, which is the comforting and comfortable end of nearly every romance; the inevitable consequence of daily and familiar association.

As Edith looks fondly over her beautiful wedding presents, it is a wise dispensation of Providence that she should be unable to foresee that, without ceaseless vigilance on her part, the silver forks will be used surreptitiously by Euphemia to clear the ashes from the grate of the kitchen range; that the drawn-work doylies will disap-

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pear one by one; that the silk cushions will grow dingy from rough handling; that the cut glass bowl will be cracked by hot water; that the Venetian glass vase, iridescent as an opal and light as a bubble, will be swept from the mantel by a savage swish of the forbidden feather-duster. Yes; it is a wise arrangement that she cannot read the future.

For her best and most merciful discipline and education these disasters will come one — or, perhaps, two — at a time. But they will surely come, and she need not think she can escape the troubles that have assailed her ancestral grandmothers back to the days of light housekeeping in Eden.

Much more forbearance, wisdom and patience have been brought to bear upon the domestic problem in the past than she will ever be able to acquire by mere observation and theorizing; accidents, misfortunes and imperfection are still rife. Nor is there hope for immediate relief from cooking schools and classes in household economics. The teachers in these practical sciences, themselves, deal largely in theories; their pupils



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are girls of intelligence, who are anxious to learn; and they work in class-rooms, not in real kitchens, where even such as they must meet the common enemy and very often be defeated.

Three virtues may be cultivated, however, which will be an ever present help in time of trouble — patience, courage and unyielding perseverance.

All these presuppose health, strength and sound nerves, which it is to be hoped that Edith possesses. Charles, on his part, may not realize that all domestic knowledge is not acquired in a day, especially where the mother has failed to train up her daughter in the way she should go. He is destined in the painful probationary stages of married life to eat many a burnt steak, scorched potato and leaden roll before the fair hand of his Edith has acquired something approaching the skill of his mother. Her apprenticeship will be for him, too, a season of physical and spiritual discipline, and, possibly, differences may arise not easily adjusted.

That was a fine old fable — “The Discontented Pendulum.” How hopeless seemed the

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ceaseless business required of the poor pendulum — counting, forever, the seconds, through days, nights, weeks, months and years. But what a difference it made when he came to realize that each second was an allotted portion of time, and only one day's work was appointed to the twenty-four hours.

In spite of everything, making and maintaining a good home is of all undertakings the best worth doing. Kate Field once said:

“The world would go on just the same if there were not a woman in the professions. It would come to speedy ruin if there were no women in the home.”

All that our highest development has brought to pass has had its origin there, except in very rare instances, for untaught waifs who have become great men and women have been few indeed. It is there that habits of accuracy and obedience must be inculcated, the two qualities above all others upon which success depends, since accuracy is only another name for honesty, and obedience for fidelity.

The woman who looks well to the ways of

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her household is a conservator of the greatest forces that shape the destinies of the race, and in what is required of her there is nothing inconsequential or of little account. She influences and nurtures in their incipiency the economic measures that better the nations and which make all wholesome life possible. A home under fine supervision is like a fertile land through which flow a myriad crystal streams; over which are spread rich fields of ripening grain; in which are rooted the fruitful trees of the orchard, the giants of the forest that lend their strength to civilization, to the building of bridges along the thoroughfares of the world, of ships that carry the traffic of the high seas, of roofs that shelter the life of the race.

It behooves the home-maker, then, to honor her place with efficiency, and to meet its demands with willingness and fortitude in which there shall be neither regret nor repining, for that which is mistakenly called a wider sphere. There is, in all the varied affairs of this world, none wider and none so sacred.







Nancy  
Hanks  
Lincoln  
Public  
Library