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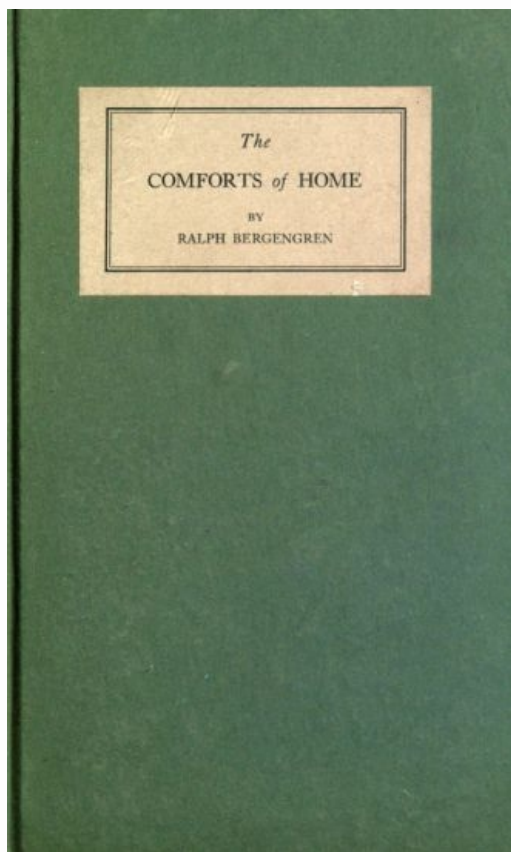
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### THE COMFORTS OF HOME

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# *The* **COMFORTS of HOME**

BY

RALPH BERGENGREN



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## THOUGHTS WHILE GETTING SETTLED

**P**ROPERLY speaking, the new house was old. A hundred years and more had gone over its chimney,—down which, as we were to discover later, a hundred flies and more would come when the open fires had warmed it,—and within doors it would have charmed any amateur of the Colonial by the antiquity of its furnishings. Temporarily it belonged to me, my executors, administrators, and assigns. But there were limits to our possession. None of us might 'permit any hole to be drilled or made in the stone or brick-work of said building'; no 'sign or placard' might we place upon it; we might not 'over-load, damage, or deface' it; nor might we 'carry on any unlawful, improper, noisy, or offensive trade' in it. We had admitted that the glass was whole and in good order, and bound ourselves to keep it good, unless broken by fire, with glass of the same kind and quality. In case I became bankrupt I had agreed that the owner, the owner's executors, the owner's administrators, and the owner's assigns should treat me with every form of ignominy that the law has yet invented to make bankruptcy more distressing. Nor could I hold them responsible if our guests fell down the cellar stairs; although there I think they would be morally responsible, for a steeper flight of cellar stairs I simply cannot imagine.

Of all documents there is hardly another so common as a lease, or more suspicious. Observe the lessor—a benevolent, dignified, but cautious person! Observe the lessee—a worm with criminal tendencies! Perhaps he is a decent sort of worm, but the lessor had better look out for him. Very likely he will commit murders in the dining-room, read the *Contes Drolatiques* in the library, play bass-drum solos in the parlor, and start a piggery in the cellar. One suspects that possibly the great army of hoboies is partly recruited from among supersensitive men who read their leases before signing them and preferred vagabondage to insult. But some of us control our sensitiveness. I, for example, read my lease; and when, having agreed mentally to post no placard myself, I discovered a clause allowing the lessor to decorate my residence with the information that it was

FOR SALE

*I crossed that clause out!*

Observe the worm turning!

It was the dining-room that had won us, formerly the kitchen and still complete—with the brick oven; the crane; the fat, three-legged pots and spider; a thing that, after much debate, we think must have been a bread-toaster; and a kind of overgrown curry-comb with which, so we imagine, the original dwellers were wont to rake the hot ashes from the brick oven. Also a warming-pan. And although these objects charm me, and I delight to live with them, I cannot but wonder whether a hundred years from now there may not be persons to furnish their dining-rooms with just such a stove as stands at present in my real kitchen; and perhaps to suspend beside it one of those quaint contraptions with which the jolly old chaps in the early twentieth century used to kill flies. I hear in imagination the host of that period explaining the implement to his wondering guests,—being expert in such matters, he will produce the technical term 'swat' with an air of easy familiarity,—and see him hanging it reverently up again beside the dear old stove and right over the picturesque old coal-hod. Perhaps, too, he will point out the beautiful, sturdy lines of the coal-hod.

Now in due time, or, to be exact, some hours later, strong men came to this house with a motor truck; and, working with concentrated fury, they put into it all our own furniture, our trunks, our books, our clothes, and everything that was ours. It had been our purpose to direct these men: to say, 'This goes here, kind sirs,' and, 'That goes there, gentlemen'; or, 'Believe me, this is the place for *that*,' or, 'Thank you, sir, but *that* is the place for *this*.' When they had come and gone, and the empty truck had rumbled away in the early autumn twilight, everything was to be just where we had planned in advance; 'getting settled' would be a light but satisfying pleasure; organization, 'efficiency in business,' for we had been reading an article in a magazine, would have made changing our home as easy as changing our clothes. But these men were beyond mortal control. They came late and their mood was to depart early. Movers always come late, for two reasons: first, because they like to feel that you are glad to see them, and, second, because they do not like to place each object just where it belongs. They prefer concentrated fury. Children of nature, they inherit their mother's abhorrence of a vacuum; unable, as they saw at a glance, to stuff the whole house from floors to ceilings, they devoted their attention, brushing us aside like annoying insects that they lacked time for killing, to stuffing such rooms as they instantly decided could be stuffed the tightest. If there was anything that we might presumably need at once, they put it at the bottom and buried it under the heaviest available furniture. It was wonderful to see them. In the end they actually took money for what they had done and went away hastily. Organization and 'efficiency in business' had accomplished something: the trunks were upstairs, and two barrels had reached their predestined place in the cellar.

There appears in many business offices, although it is not, so far as I know, the official slogan of 'efficiency in business,' a card with the motto, 'Do It Now.' I looked into that room which was destined to be the library: formerly it had been a bedroom, and the four-poster bed and noble mahogany bureau were to have vanished upstairs before my arrival. But now, peering past and above and under the débris that the avalanche had left there, I recognized the noble mahogany bureau in the far corner, mourning presumably for its departed companion, the four-poster. I beheld it with a misgiving which I tried to put from me, but which came back from moment to moment and whispered in whichever ear was nearer.

'Just suppose,' whispered Misgiving, 'that the man who was hired to take that bureau upstairs found that it wouldn't go up!!!!'

And I thought of that stairway, that went up furtively from the dining-room which had once been the kitchen, a delightful stairway (especially when one realized what a discouraging time a burglar would have in finding it, and how he would probably find the cellar stairs instead and die of a broken neck at the bottom), but narrow, narrow; and with a right angle just where a right angle was least desirable. It had been as much as they could do to get up the trunks.

'You will very likely have to leave the bureau in the library,' whispered Misgiving, 'and that will be inconvenient—won't it?—when you have company. Company will have to dress in the library or else gather up its clothes and run.'—'Library!' said Misgiving. 'Who ever heard of a bureau in a library? People will think the library table is a folding bed. You can't disguise a noble old bureau like that by putting books on it,' said Misgiving. 'Once a bureau always a bureau.—What will your wife say,' asked Misgiving, 'when she learns that the spare-room bureau has to stay downstairs in the library?'

People who, having something to do, 'do it now,' live in the present. I seized the nearest object, a chair, and dragged it into the next room; I seized the next object, a box, and carried it to the cellar; I risked my life on the cellar stairs; I became concentrated fury myself. In getting settled, whether you are a pioneer or a householder, the first thing is to make a clearing. No matter where things go, provided only that they go somewhere else. No matter what happened, no matter if bureaus remained forever in libraries, no matter if the awful puzzle that the strong men of the moving van had left me remained forever insoluble—this was my home and I had to live in it for the term of one year. I took off my coat, hung it up somewhere—and found it again two days afterward. I attacked boxes, chairs, tables, boxes, books, bric-à-brac, more boxes, chairs, tables. I ran here and there, carrying things. I excelled the bee. I made a clearing, which grew larger and larger. I gained self-confidence. Elsewhere I knew that other hands were unpacking trunks; that another mind was directing those mysteries which out of chaos would evolve dinner; now and then, in my death-defying feat of going down cellar, I caught a glimpse of the furnace,—fat-bellied monster whom I must later feed like a coal-eating baby.

It is a question—parenthetically—whether it is truly sportsmanlike to live in a quaint old colonial cottage with a furnace and electric lights. I have heard amateurs of the Colonial declare that they would willingly die before they would live in an electrically lighted colonial cottage. The anachronism horrifies them: they would have death or candles. Probably they feel the same way about a furnace and a bath-room. Yet I have no doubt that the builders of this colonial cottage would have opened their hearts to all these inventions; and I am not sure that they would have regarded as anything but funny the idea that their own kitchen paraphernalia would some day be used to decorate my dining-room. I go further. Granting that electric lights, a furnace, and a bath-room are anachronisms in this quaint old colonial cottage—what am I but an anachronism myself? We must stand together, the furnace, the electric metre, the porcelain bath-tub, and I, and keep each other in countenance.

'H-m-m-m-m!' whispered Misgiving. 'How about a bureau in the library? That isn't an anachronism; it's an absurdity.'

Making a clearing is a long step forward in getting settled; after that it is a matter of days, a slow dawn of orderliness. In a quaint old colonial cottage are many closets, few if any of them located according to modern notions of convenience. The clothes closet that ought to be in the spare room upstairs is downstairs in the library with the spare-room bureau; the upstairs closets are under the eaves of the sloping roof—the way to utilize them to the best advantage is to enter on your hands and knees, carrying an electric torch between your teeth. Inside the closet you turn on your back, illuminate the pendant garments with your torch, drag whatever you select down from the hook, grasp it firmly with your teeth, and so out again on your hands and knees, rolling the electric torch gently before you. We see now why in those good old days chests of drawers were popular—fortunately we have one of our own that somehow has got up the stairway; and we see also, as we begin to settle into it, what is perhaps the secret of this humbler colonial architecture. The Colonial Jack who built this house wanted some rooms round a chimney and a roof that the snow would slide off; and so he built it; and where-ever he found a space he made a closet or a cupboard; and because he had no other kind, he put in small-paned windows; and all he did was substantial and honest—and beautiful, in its humble way, by accident.

But about that bureau?

Two strong, skillful men, engaged for the purpose, juggled with it, this way and that, muttering words of equally great strength—*and it went upstairs*. Had it been a quarter of an inch wider, they said afterward, the feat would have been impossible. It was a small margin, but it will save the company from having to knock timidly on the library door when it wishes to dress for dinner.

## PRAISE OF OPEN FIRES

**I**HAVE read and heard much praise of open fires, but I recall no praise of bringing in the wood. There is, to be sure, the good old song:—

Come bring with a noise,  
My merrie, merrie boys,  
The Christmas log to the firing;  
While my good dame, she  
Bids ye all make free,  
And drink to your heart's desiring.

But this refers to a particular log, the Yule log (or clog, as they used to call it) which was brought in only once a year, and, even so, the singer evidently is *not* bringing it in himself. He is looking on. The merrie, merrie boys, he thinks, need encouragement. After they have got the log in, and the good dame has produced the rewarding jug, bowl, or bottle, everybody will feel better. Dry without and wet within; how oft, indeed, has praise of open fire kept company with praise of open bottle! Forests uncounted have been cut down,—the hillside beech, from where the owlets meet and screech; the crackling pine, the cedar sweet, the knotted oak, with fragrant peat,—and burned up, stick by stick; so that, as the poet explains, the bright flames, dancing, winking, shall light us at our drinking.

Others than inebriates have sung the praise of open fires; but the most highly respectable, emulating the bright flames, have usually winked at drinking. But never one of them, so far as I remember, has praised the honest, wholesome, *temperate* exercise of bringing in the wood.

And there is the Song That Has Never Been Sung—nor ever will be, so the tune is immaterial:—

How jolly it is, of a cold winter morning,  
To pop out of bed just a bit before dawning,

And, thinking the while of your jolly cold bath,  
To kindle a flame on your jolly cold hearth!

Ah me, it is merry!

Sing derry-down-derry!

Where now is the lark? I am up before him.

I chuckle with glee at this quaint little whim.

I make up the fire—pray Heaven it catches!

But what in the world have they done with the matches?

Ah me, it is merry!

Sing derry-down-derry!

And so forth, and so forth.

I invented that song myself, in January, 1918, when circumstances led me—so to speak, by the nape of the neck—to heat my home with wood because nowhere could I buy coal. But I felt no impulse to sing it—simply a deeper, kindlier sympathy for forefather in the good old days before stoves and furnaces. I do not blame him for not taking a cold bath. I wish in vain that he had had the thing that I call a match. An archæological authority tells me how forefather managed without it:—

'Holding between the thumb and forefinger of the right hand a piece of imported gun-flint (long quarried at Brandon in Suffolk, England), strike it diagonally against a circlet of properly tempered steel held in the left hand, so that the spark flies downward on a dry, scorched linen rag lying in a tin cup (the tinder-box). When the spark instantly catches the rag, blow or touch it into flame against the sulphur-tipped end of a match, which will not otherwise ignite. Then with the burning match, light a candle socketed in the lid of the tinder-box, and smother the smouldering rag with an inner tin lid dropped upon it. Thus you were master of the house of a winter's morning when the fires were out.'

But I wouldn't believe that archæological authority if he had added, 'singing at your task.' Singeing at it seems more plausible.

To many of us plain bread-and-butter persons, praise of open fires sometimes seems a little too warm and comfortable—too smugly contemplative. We like open fires. We would have them in every room in the house except the kitchen and bath-room—and perhaps in the bath-room, where we could hang our towels from the mantelpiece (as gallant practical gentlemen, now some centuries dead, named it by hanging up their wet mantles), and let them warm while we were taking our baths. We go as far as any in regarding the open fire as a welcoming host in the hall, an undisturbing companion in the library, an encourager of digestion in the dining-room, an enlivener in the living-room, and a good-night thought of hospitality in the guest-chamber. But we cannot follow the essayist who speaks scornfully of hot-water pipes. 'From the security of ambush,' says he, 'they merely heat, and heat whose source is invisible is not to be coveted at all.'

Oh, *merely* heat! The blithe gentleman betrays himself out of his own ink-well. He may have forgotten it,—very likely somebody else takes care of it,—but there is a furnace in his cellar. Does he, we ask him seriously, covet the reciprocal affection of some beloved woman—start as angrily as he may at our suggestion of any comparison between *her* and a hot-water pipe—*only when he can see her*? Or, supposing him a confirmed woman-hater, does he repudiate underwear?

He brushes aside the questions. 'With a fire in one's bedroom,' says he, 'sleep comes witchingly.'

'Unless,' say we, 'a spark or coal jumps out on the rug and starts to set the bedroom afire. Better,' say we, pursuing the subject in our heavy way, 'a Philistine in bed than a *fellow of fine* taste stamping out a live coal with his bare feet.'

And so we thank the thoughtful host who safely and sanely screens the open fire in his guest-chamber; but fie, fie upon him if he has decoratively arranged on our temporary hearth *Wood without Kindlings!*

If you give it half a chance, my friend, this 'joy perpetual,' as you call it, will eat you up.

And yet we agree with anybody that nothing else in the house has appealed so long and so universally to the imagination of man. It began before houses. Remote and little in the far perspective of time, we see a distant and awful-looking relative, whom we blush to acknowledge, kindling his fire; and that fire, open as all outdoors, was the seed and beginning of domestic living. With it, the Objectionable Ancestor learned to cook, and in this way differentiated himself from the beasts. Kindling it, he learned to swear, and differentiated himself further. Thinking about it, his dull but promising mind conceived the advantage of having somebody else to kindle it; so he caught an awful-looking woman, and instituted the family circle. Soon, I fancy, he acquired the habit of sitting beside his fire when he should have been doing something more active; but a million years must pass before he was presentable, and another million before he had coat-tails, and could stand in front of it, spreading them like a peacock in the pride of his achievement—a Captain Bonavita turning his back on the lion. I would have you note, for what it may be worth, that praise of open fires has always been masculine rather than feminine.

Nowadays, I judge, many of his descendants find the open fire much like a little movie theatre in the home. Under the proscenium arch of the fireplace the flames supply actors and scenery, and the show goes on indefinitely. It is better than a movie, for it has color, and lacks the agonizing facial contortions and interpolated text: 'Even a Princess is just a girl—at Coney Island'; 'It is like the nobility of your true heart, old friend, but I cannot accept the heroic sacrifice.'

Sometimes it is useful. An author sits by the fire, and smokes; and soon the puppets of his next romance obligingly appear and act a chapter for him. To-morrow he will dictate that chapter to his pretty stenographer. Sometimes it is consoling. A lover sits by the fire and smokes; presently he sees his love in the flames, and sighs—as Shakespeare would say—like a furnace. Sometimes it doesn't work. *I* sit by the fire, and smoke; and I see nothing but fire and smoke.

It is a pleasant place to sit—and yet how rapidly and unanimously, when coal came into use, and stoves came on the market, did people stop sitting, and brick up their fireplaces! They had no time for essays, but praise of stoves ascended wherever the wonderful things were available. A new world was born: stoves! kitchen ranges! furnaces! hot-water pipes! heat all over the house!—invisible, to be sure, but nobody seemed to worry about that. And out went

the open fire—to be lit again later, but never again as a cooker of food and a warmer of the whole house. It came back to be sat by.

There are times, indeed,—speaking as the spokesman of bread-and-butter,—when the open fire *seems* to stimulate amazingly our powers of conversation. We sparkle (for us); we become (or at least we feel) engagingly animated; but is it really the open fire? I have met those with whom it is no more stimulating to sit cosily beside an open fire than cosily beside an open sea or an open trolley-car or an open window or an open oyster. I have known others in whose company a kitchen range seemed just as stimulating.

Fires go out, but each new flame is a reincarnation. Our open fires are but miniatures of the old-time roarers that set the hall or tavern harmlessly ablaze, and lit its windows for the ruddy encouragement of winter-blown travelers. Reverting to the menagerie for a figure, the open fires of the past were lions, those of to-day are cubs. Like cubs they amuse us; and so we forget what grim and tragic humors of life the open fire must necessarily have witnessed. Was it not before an open fire that Cain killed Abel? In the glow of those bright flames, dancing, winking, has been planned every villainy of which mankind is capable: winked they have at every sin that could be sinned by fire-light. Elemental and without morals, the open fire has lived in hovels as well as in palaces; it has lighted the student, heels in air and lying on his belly to study his book; the Puritan on his knees at prayer; the reveler, flat on his back and snoring in maudlin sleep under the table. And now, a luxury of the well-to-do, it is departing, dancing and winking as usual, out of the universal life to which it has been as necessary as cooked food and warmth in winter.

But perhaps, after all, it is not yet too late for praise of bringing in the wood. Let us at least provide the good old song, and trust to luck that four or five hundred years from now some imaginative gentleman, digesting his dinner before a surviving open fire, will hear afar off the faint but jolly chorus:—

Come, lads, all together,  
And get the wood in.  
This brisk zero weather  
Is pleasant as sin.  
Put on your warm hosen,  
And shuffle a bit;  
Your toes may be frozen  
Before you know it.  
To sit mug-a-mugging  
The fire who could,  
That might be out lugging  
In armfuls of wood?  
In—armfuls—of—wood!

## FURNACE AND I

**S**UMMER is the favorite time to advertise furnaces, for, although a pacifist might argue that being prepared for cold weather encourages frost, the practical persons who make and sell heating plants are firm believers in preparedness. They produce diagrams and pictures, showing how *their* furnace bisects the coal bill, and how easily a pretty child can run it from the front hall.

But my furnace is different. I defy the prettiest child imaginable to run it. Indeed, in a strict sense, I defy anybody to run it; for this furnace has a mind of its own and an odd ambition to behave like a thermometer. On a warm day it goes up, on a cold day it goes down; in zero weather it takes all the time of a determined man to head it off from becoming a large, inconvenient refrigerator. As for bisecting coal bills, the creature *likes coal*. I have even thought that it uttered strange, self-congratulatory, happy noises whenever there occurred a rise in the price of its favorite edible.

Before meeting this furnace I had lived in apartments, and my mental conception of a ton of coal had been as of something enormous, sufficient to heat the average house a month. A furnace was to me a remote mystery operated by a high priest called 'janitor,' whom I vaguely connected with the lines of Smollett,—

Th' Hesperian dragon not more fierce and fell;  
Nor the gaunt, growling janitor of Hell.

I took my heat as a matter of course. If I wanted more of it, I spoke warmly to the janitor through a speaking tube, and—after a while—there was more heat. If I wanted less, I spoke to him coldly, in the same distant, godlike way, and—after a while—there was less heat. In neither case, I discovered, did an ordinary tone of voice get any result whatever; and, although a fat man himself, he sometimes growled back through the tube very much like the gaunt specimen mentioned by Smollett. But I gave little thought to him. I had what is called an 'intelligent idea' that to produce more heat he opened a 'draft,' and to reduce heat he closed it, the effect of a draft on a furnace being just the opposite to its effect on a janitor. At night he 'shook the furnace down,' in the morning he 'shook the furnace up.' One gathers such knowledge casually, without conscious effort or realization. I had in fact no more curiosity about the furnace than about the sun, for I seemed as unlikely to run one heater as the other.

Then, like many another man who has lived in apartments, I turned suburbanite. I had a furnace, and I had to run it myself. How well I remember that autumn day when I started my first furnace fire!

There sat the monster on the floor of the cellar, impassive as Buddha, and apparently holding up the house with as many arms as an octopus—hollow arms through which presently would flow the genial heat. I peeked cautiously

through a little door into his stomach, and marveled at its hollow immensity. I reached in till my arm ached—and my hand dangled in empty space. But my intelligence told me that there must be a bottom. Crumpling a newspaper into a great wad, I dropped it down, down into the monster's gullet, where it vanished forever. I crumpled and dropped another; I continued, until at last—oh, triumph of mind and industry over incalculable depth!—I *saw newspaper*, and had something tangible on which to erect a pyre of kindlings. Where I could reach I laid them crosswise, and where I couldn't I tossed them in at varying angles, gaining skill with practice.

'It is like a great wooden nest!' cried I in astonishment. 'Now I know why the coal I have bought for my furnace is called "egg."'

I lit the fire and made a grand smoke.

It rose through the kindlings; it piled out through the little door; it hung like great cobwebs to the roof of the cellar. With great presence of mind I hastily closed the little door and ran lightly up the cellar-stairs. The smoke had preceded me; it got there first through the registers; and more was coming.

I met a woman.

'Is the house afire?' she asked excitedly.

I calmed her. 'It is *not*,' I replied quietly, in a matter-of-course way. 'When you start a fire for the winter it always smokes a little.'

We opened the windows. We went outside and looked at the house. It leaked smoke through every crevice except, curiously enough, the chimney. Ah-h-h-h-h! I saw what had happened. I groped my way to the cellar and opened the back damper. Now the smoke went gladly up the chimney, and the view through the little door was at once beautiful and awful: it was like looking into the heart of an angry volcano. Evidently it was time to lay the eggs on the nest.

I shoveled the abyss full of coal, and the volcano became extinct. Presently, instead of a furnace full of fire, I had a furnace full of egg coal. I began taking it out, egg by egg, at first with my fingers and then with the tongs from the dining-room fireplace. And when the woman idly questioned me as to what I was going to do down cellar with the tongs, I bit my lips.

To the man who runs it (an absurd term as applied to a thing that has no legs and weighs several tons) the furnace is his first thought in the morning and his last thought at night. His calendar has but two seasons—winter, when the furnace is going, and summer, when the furnace is out. But in summer his thoughts are naturally more philosophical. He sees how profoundly this recent invention (which he is not at the time running) has changed man's attitude toward nature.

I am, of course, not referring to those furnaces which are endowed with more than the average human intelligence; those superfurnaces which are met with in the advertisements, which shake themselves down, shovel their own coal, carry and sift their own ashes, regulate their own draughts, and, if they do not actually order and pay for their own coal, at least consume it as carefully as if they did.

With a furnace like mine a man experiences all the emotions of which he is capable. He loves, he hates, he admires, he despises, he grieves, he exults. There have been times when I have felt like patting my furnace; and again, times when I have slammed his little door and spoken words to him far, far hotter than the fire that smouldered and refused to burn in his bowels. I judge from what I have read that taming a wild animal must be a good deal like taming a furnace, with one important exception: the wild-animal-tamer never loses his temper or the beast would kill him; but a furnace, fortunately for suburban mortality, cannot kill its tamer.

When his furnace happens to be good-natured, however, a man will often find the bedtime hour with it pleasant and even enjoyable. He descends, humming or whistling, to the cellar; and the subsequent shaking and shoveling is, after all, no more than a healthy exercise which he would not otherwise take and which will make him sleep better. He is friendly with this rotund, coal-eating giant; he regards it almost like a big baby which he is putting to bed—or, at least, he *might* so regard it if putting a baby to bed was one of his recognized pleasures.

But, oh, what a difference in the morning! He awakes in the dark, startled perhaps from some pleasant dream by the wild alarm-m-m-m of a clock under his pillow; and outside the snug island of warmth on which he lies, the Universe stretches away in every direction, above, below, and on every side of him, cold, dreary, and unfit for human habitation, to and beyond the remotest star. In that cold Universe how small he is!—how warm and how weak! Instantly he thinks of the furnace, and the remotest star seems near by comparison. The thought of getting up and going down cellar seems as unreal as the thought of getting up and going to meet the sun at that pale streak which, through his easterly window, heralds the reluctant coming of another day. Yet he knows that he *must*, and that eventually he *will*, get up. In vain he tells himself how splendid, how invigorating will be the plunge *from his warm bed* right into the fresh, brisk, hygienic morning air.

The fresh, brisk, hygienic morning air does not appeal to him. Unwillingly he recalls a line in the superfurnace advertisement,—'Get up warm and cosy,'—and helplessly wishes that *he* had such a furnace. 'Like Andrew Carnegie!' he adds bitterly. At that moment he would anarchistically assassinate Andrew, provided he could do it without getting up. Nevertheless—he gets up! He puts on—'Curse it, *where* is that sleeve?'—the bath-robe and slippers that have been all night cooling for him, and starts on his lonely journey through the tomblike silence. Now, if ever, is the time to hum, but there is not a hum in him: down, down, down he goes to the cellar and peeks with dull hope through the familiar little door. 'Good morning, Fire.' He shakes, he shovels, he opens drafts and manipulates dampers. And the Furnace, impassive, like a Buddha holding up the house with as many arms as an octopus, seems to be watching him with a grave yet idle interest. Which is all the more horrible because it has no face.

**NO STAIRS!—NO ATTIC**

**A**TTICS are done for! Listen to the words of the man who has built, and written about, what he calls a Servantless Cottage:—

'Climbing stairs is oftentimes too strenuous for the happy housewife, so there must be no stairs.'

Shades of our grandmothers! If we can believe this enthusiastic designer and builder, only a few more decades at most will miserable women, unhappy housewives, and, by inference, undesirable mothers, continue to drag up and down stairs their pitiful existences in houses of more than one story.

'No stairs! No stairs!' the young wife cried,  
And clapped her hands to see  
A house as like a little flat  
As any house could be!

And observe also, not only the vanishing of stairs and attics, but the disappearance of the servant-problem. 'For in this Servantless Cottage,' says the satisfied man, 'milady need fear no drudgery. A very few hours will suffice for housekeeping and cookery. Work becomes a pleasure and a maid undesirable.'

Well, well! There have been a good many proposed solutions of the domestic service question—but to solve it by giving it up seems no very crowning triumph of domestic mathematics. The experience of innumerable young married couples with kitchenettes goes to show that life can be conducted under that solution, especially when the couples are young and but recently married. Then, indeed, they need neither an attic in the top of the house nor a general—that brave girl capable of turning a quick efficient hand to everything from dusting to doughnuts—all over it. But why not, for that matter, admit that 'climbing is oftentimes too strenuous for a happy general.' She, too is human—has legs—gets tired—

This designer of servantless cottages was, I imagine, an atticless child: he climbed no stairs to that room of pleasing mystery, rich in dusty and discarded things that had once been living and important in the life of his family, where the sunbeams streamed like a ladder down through the skylight, or, on other days, the drops of water pelted its narrow panes and added their orchestral voices to the symphony of rain on the roof. His grandparents had died when he was a baby; their house had been sold or torn down, their attic accumulations scattered, and his family lived in a new house where the attic had as yet taken on no more attraction to juvenile adventure than the spare bedroom. He was, probably, a thoughtful child who brooded over his mother's troubles in securing and keeping satisfactory 'help.' The house in which he passed those young years was very likely built in the time of high ceilings and long flights of stairs,—how often, through the banisters, had the little fellow seen his mother's tired ankles lagging on the ascent as he sat in the library poring over some volume of architecture!—and he took a childish oath that when *he* married—how little he knew about that!—*his* wife should not have to climb stairs, *his* wife should not have to worry about servants. Yet for a long time it seemed as if he would never marry, for it did not occur to him to put in an escalator. And then one day, in his maturity, spurred perhaps by a more understanding and ardent desire, and driven harder by the unselfish thought that, even while he dreamed, SHE might marry somebody else and be doomed for life to climbing stairs and engaging new servants, he saw the solution. He would build a house of only one story and let HER do the work.

Now, as a matter of fact, a bungalow is a pretty good thing. If this student of architecture and domestic economics had contented himself with a plain and simple description of his servantless cottage, I dare say I should have read it in the most friendly spirit imaginable: and certainly with no desire to criticize his conclusions. It was that silly remark about 'milady' that aroused opposition. We live in a republic and we are most of us reasonably self-respecting men and women, not a milady among us, unless she happens to be making a visit—in which case, one place she is not visiting is a servantless cottage. And so, in a word, the servantless cottage ceases to be an honest, more or less successful effort to provide a home in which the housewife can most conveniently do her own work, and appears a neat little example of snobbish absurdity. Work becomes a pleasure to the happy housewife for whom climbing a flight of stairs is oftentimes all too strenuous—so keen and persistent a pleasure that domestic service is 'undesirable!' Is anybody really expected to believe it? Or is domestic service itself a phase of domesticity that can be so cheerfully eliminated? Has the servant—and, bless you! the word has often enough been a term of honor—no really fine and enduring place in the scheme of gracious and cultivated domestic management?

For many generations, stairs and service have been inseparable from the amenities of domestic living. One has only to imagine these two essentials suddenly eliminated from literature, to experience a pained sensation at the care-free way in which the man of the servantless cottage gets rid of them. And one has only to look about the world as it stands at present, servant-problem and all, to realize that it is the value of good domestic service which actually creates and keeps alive the problem itself. For even if the happy housewife enjoys every single item of housekeeping and cookery, there are times when her personal attention to them is obviously undesirable.

Imagine our servantless cottage as an example. Milady sings at her work. The portable vacuum cleaner—milord keeps up with all the latest improvements—gratefully eats up its daily dust. The fireless cooker prepares the meals 'with a perfection and deliciousness unrealized in the old days.' *À bas* mother and the way she used to cook! But in serving these meals of a hitherto unrealized perfection and deliciousness, milord and milady must needs chase each other between kitchen and dining-room. The guest at dinner, if he is luckily accustomed to picnics, carries his own plate and washes it afterward. I have myself entertained many a guest in this fashion, and he has carried his own plate, and, being that kind of a guest or I wouldn't have invited him, he has cheerfully helped wash the dishes, wearing a borrowed apron. But it would be absurd to claim that this performance, indefinitely repeated, is an improvement upon an orderly, efficiently served dinner-party. Conversation at dinner is more desirable than a foot-race between the courses; nor do I believe that life under such conditions can possibly 'become so alluring that one day the great majority of us will choose it first of all.'

Concerning stairs: I perhaps have more feeling for them than most; but I am quite sure that I speak at least for a large minority. It is the flatness of the flat, its very condensed and restricted cosiness, its very lack of upstairs and downstairs, which prevents it from ever attaining completely the atmosphere of a home. The feet which cross the floor above your head are those of another family; the sounds which reach you from below are the noises of strangers; the life horizontal of the flat serves its convenient use but only emphasizes the independence and self-respect of the life vertical, master of the floor above, master likewise of the basement. I, who have lived happily in a flat, nevertheless feel more human, less like some ingeniously constructed doll, when I can take my candle in hand



and go upstairs to sleep. Because I have lived happily in a flat, I want no bungalow. There is something fine in going to sleep even one flight nearer the stars—and away from the dining-room.

And no stairs—no attic. My conviction increases that this man was an atticless child, without grandparents himself, and without thought of his own possible grandchildren. Or is the stairless, servantless, atticless cottage—'truly the little house is the house of the future'—meant also to be childless? An examination of the plan shows a so-called bedroom marked 'guest or children,' which indicates that the happy housewife must exercise her own judgment. There are accommodations for one guest or two children, but it seems fairly evident that guest and children exclude each other. Milord and milady must decide between hospitality and race-suicide, or two children and no week-end visitor. Some will choose guest; some will choose children. Personally I hope they will all choose children; for, even without an attic, there is plenty of playground. 'People with tiny incomes' must always be careful not to purchase too small a lot; and so we find that the servantless cottage has paths, and a lawn, and flowers, and shrubbery, and a sun-dial, and an American elm, and a 'toadstool canopy' between the poplars and the white birches, and an ivy-covered 'cache' to store the trunks in. I am glad there is going to be such a domestic convenience as a sun-dial; and perhaps, when there is a guest, the trunks can be taken out on the lawn and the children put to bed in the 'cache.'

But I guess that, after all, stairs will survive, and attics, and the servant-problem. Innumerable families are already living in servantless houses, with stairs, and it doesn't even occur to them that they are solving any problem whatsoever. Innumerable housewives are about as happy under these conditions as most of us get to be under any conditions. The servant-problem itself is not the young and tender problem that many of us imagine. An examination of old newspapers will show anybody who is sufficiently patient and curious that a hundred years ago there was much indignant wonder that young women, visibly suited for domestic service, preferred to be seamstresses! What is more modern is the grave enthusiasm with which so many persons are trying to decide how the rest of us shall live with the maximum amount of comfort and culture for the minimum expenditure. And one interesting similarity between many of these suggestions is their passive opposition to another important group of critics.

'Have large families or perish as a nation!' shriek our advisers on one hand. 'Have small families or perish as individuals!' proclaim our advisers on the other.

For this servantless cottage is typical of a good many other housing suggestions in which the essential element is the small family; and even the possibility that the children may live to grow up seems to have been left out of consideration. Milord and milady, I imagine, have chosen children instead of a guest. These children (a boy and girl, as I like to picture them) grow up; marry; settle in their own servantless cottages, and have two children apiece. There are now a grandfather and a grandmother, a son and a daughter, a son-in-law and a daughter-in-law, and four grandchildren. In each servantless cottage there is that one bedroom marked 'guest or children.' Granting all the possibilities of the ivy-covered 'cache,'—and now the trunks will simply *have* to be taken out and stood on the lawn even if the snow does fall on them,—milord and milady, come Christmas or other anniversary, can entertain a visit from all their children and grandchildren, one family taking the 'guest or children' bedroom, and the other the 'cache.' Later, as the children grow older, each family will come back to the old home on alternate Christmases: and by utilizing the 'cache,' a son or daughter can receive a short visit from the aged parents, not too long, of course, or it would ruin the trunks. As for any of the hearty, old-fashioned, up-and-down-stairs hospitality—I may be an old fogey myself, but the servantless cottage shocks me.

'Our bedroom resembles a cosy state-room on board ship.' Oh! la-la-la-la! Why doesn't somebody solve the problem of domestic living by suggesting that we all live in house-boats?

## CONCERNING KITCHENS

**M**ANY a man, I am sure, who never in his mature life thinks emotionally of his own kitchen, still keeps a tender memory of some kitchen of his early youth. It may have been his mother's, his grandmother's, or his Aunt Susan's; and not often, but once in a great while, something reminds him of it. His thoughts hark back, and he touches, in his own degree, the emotion of Uncle Felix (whom you will remember if you have ever read 'The Extra Day') alone at night in Mrs. Horton's kitchen.

'And Uncle Felix traveled backwards against the machinery of Time that cheats the majority so easily with its convention of moving hands and ticking voice and bullying, staring visage. He slid swiftly down the long banister-descent of years, and reached in a flash that old sombre Yorkshire kitchen, and stood, four-foot nothing, face smudged and fingers sticky, beside the big deal table with the dying embers of the grate upon his right. His heart was beating. He could just reach the juicy cake without standing on a chair. He ate the very slice that he had eaten forty years ago. It *was* possible to have your cake and eat it too!'

For my own part,—and no doubt each backward traveler has his particular kitchen memory,—I ate the crisp brown beans off the top of the bean-pot. It was a sort of ceremonial; a Saturday-night function, irrespective of whatever menial might at the time be in official charge of our kitchendom. The baking of the beans was never altogether trusted to a menial. My mother, last thing before bed, would go out to the kitchen, lighting her way with a kerosene lamp; and I with her. We put the lamp on the table; we opened the oven door—and all over the kitchen spread the delectable, mouth-watering aroma of the baking bean. We took out the bean-pot. Then we scraped off the crisp top layer of the beans into a saucer. And these we ate!

My mother wore a bustle, and at that historic period there were no kitchenettes; nor had the Spirit of Efficiency inspired the thought of planning your kitchen with a route for food-preparation which makes a flying start at the ice-chest, takes in the meat, fish, and vegetable shelves, touches at the cabinet for dough-mixing, skirts the pan cabinet, and so (as Master Pepys would say) to the stove. There were no scientifically determined routes for food-serving and

dish-washing. Each menial, and my mother herself between menials, followed a kind of cow path. My mother had never had it figured out for her that the lowest estimate of time spent at the sink alone is two hours daily, and that these two hours a day count up to five days of twelve hours each in the course of a month, or sixty twelve-hour days at the sink every year. And when, as the expert modern kitchen-planner points out, it is realized that these sixty days are spent in useless stooping, and that, to this strain, is added the fatigue of miles of unnecessary steps, one gets an idea of the kitchen which I am glad to think never occurred to her.

Nor, on the other hand, do I think my mother would have quite followed the mental state of the rhapsodist who writes of housework in general,—

'When I am about the house, taking part in the work, I am of course conscious, among other things, of the rhythmical qualities of housework. But when I stay apart from it, and listen to it, it comes to seem all rhythm, both in the larger sense of regular recurrence of tasks, and in the repetition of sounds with insistent *ichthus* and pause. Ironing, for example, is nearly as pleasant to listen to as to watch. Not by one stroke of the iron, but by many, is the linen polished and the cambric smoothed to a satin daintiness; the blows follow one another, now slowly, now fast, like the drum-beat of some strange march. There is rhythm in the kitchen; rhythm in the dining-room.... Most soothing of all household rhythm is the swish of the broom. It is gentle and low-keyed. It takes my attention from other things, and makes me think of abstractions. I wonder whether there is not some mathematical calculation by which a ratio can be established between power of stroke, length of arm, and good-will. And so speculating I sink into comfortable depths of nothingness.'

Oh, shade of Mary Ann, the Perfect Servant Girl!

But this digression into the '*ichthus* and pause' of housework—I seem to hear my mother, '*Who is the lunatic?*'—takes me away from the kitchen. I hurry back to it, for, although it is not a place where I wish to live, it is very much a place where I like to visit. Though not with the cook. When I was younger, I enjoyed visiting with the cook, but the years have separated us; I have, as it were, grown apart from her. Granting her absence, there is a homely, cheery informality about a kitchen; and if the lady of the house will take you there herself, some rainy afternoon in the country, and serve tea on the clean, plain table, and let you butter the toasted crackers yourself, *with all the butter you please*, why, for my part, I ask no more this side of Paradise. To use a quaint old obsolete word, I like to be 'kitchened'—provided, of course, that I may select my kitchener. So, I understand, does the policeman: our tastes are different, but we are both human.

And yet this kitchen, as we know it to-day, is comparatively recent, and already insidiously passing away from the larger cities to, I hope, a long survival in the country and suburbs. If I were of an older generation (also insidiously passing away), I would be able to recall another kind of kitchen, where colonial customs of cookery held sway well into the twentieth century. To me the stove seems ancient only because, thank God! I am not ancient myself; I find it hard to believe that when my grandmother bought her stove, her up-to-date spirit marched bravely from one period of kitchendom into another. But men still living remember how their very mothers baked bread in a brick oven, and have seen in operation many of the queer old cooking things we somewhat younger mortals wonder at in museums. Only a bit further back, the fireplace, at its most generous, had room for a seat in the corner, and grandmother sat there,—it was really what the kitchen-planners would call a rest corner,—sometimes, comfortable old creature, smoking her honest pipe and observing the stars by daytime as she watched the smoke on its journey up the big chimney. But the newfangled kitchen range was much more convenient; the easier management of a coal fire made a new day in household economics; a delighted generation busily bricked up the fireplaces. And so the sturdy useful kitchen stove is not so very ancient; and the homely, hospitable kitchen, even of our childhood memory, is still so new that only to-day is the Spirit of Efficiency providing it with routes of travel to save those wasted steps that mother used to take, and a cosy rest corner, cunningly placed to solace the soul of a tired cook with prophylactic contemplation of the most restful available scenery.

All day long on the kitchen routes  
Her helpful feet have gone,  
With never a senseless, wasted step  
Between the dusk and dawn;

And now, dear soul, at the kitchen sink  
She has washed the final spoon,  
And sat her down in her rest corner  
To look at the rising moon.

But the life of our larger cities is growingly inimical to kitchens. In the more distinguished sections, unfortunately, one must be more than ordinarily well-to-do to live in a house that has a kitchen: otherwise one lives in an apartment and has a kitchenette. In my bright lexicon, published by the Century Company in 1889, there is no such word. The thing did not exist. This Peter Pan of domestic institutions, the baby kitchen that never grows up, had yet to be born. And a great army of other equally unborn babies, who would be shrewdly created male and female, waited in the mystery of non-existence until such time as they, too, should enter upon life, grow up, discover each other in happily surprised couples, love, marry, and set up housekeeping with two rooms, a bath, and a kitchenette. It was then impossible—though I have since done it myself—for a gentleman to take his morning bath, shave, and cook the breakfast all at the same time, stepping with accurate judgment out of his porcelain bath-tub and into the contiguous kitchenette, and so back and forth, bathing, lathering, shaving, percolating the coffee, and turning the toast. Perhaps, also, humming a little tune.

Here, too, as the rhapsodist I have already quoted would say, is rhythm; nor is it impossible that the same imagination would find a wild yet orderly beauty in the design extemporized by his wet footprints between his kitchenette and his bath-tub.

But the thing isn't a kitchen, though it serves many of the kitchen's practical purposes. It lacks the space, dignity, comfort, and opportunity for helpful conversation. I cannot imagine any gentleman of the future recalling with poignant pleasure his childhood kitchenette. In fact, I cannot even imagine a child in a kitchenette.

## THE PLUMBER APPRECIATED

'**D**ID you ever,' said he, 'know a plumber who had grown rich?'

We stood in the kitchen. Outdoors it was a wonderful winter morning, snow-white and sparkling, felt rather than seen through frosted windows, for the mercury last night had dropped below zero, and, although reported on the way up, was not climbing with real enthusiasm. On the floor was a little sea of water, in shape something like the Mediterranean, with Gibraltar out of sight under the kitchen sink. The stove (unfortunately) had been lighted; and a strange, impassive boy stood beside it, holding in pendant hands various tools of the plumber's craft. The plumber stood in the Mediterranean. And I, in my slippers and bath-robe,—a foolish costume, for the sea was not deep enough to bathe in,—hovered, so to speak, on the edge of the beach.

I suppose I wished to impress this plumber with my imperturbable calm. Upset as I was, I must have realized the impossibility of impressing the boy. Swaggering a little in my bath-robe, I had said something jocular, I do not remember just what, about the rapid accretion of wealth by plumbers. He lit his pipe. 'Did you ever,' said he, 'know a plumber who had grown rich?'

Now until that winter I had never thought of the plumber as a man in many respects like myself. One may winter for years in a city apartment without meeting a plumber, but hardly without reading a good many humorous trifles about them in current literature; and my idea of this craftsman had been insidiously formed by the minor humorists. Summer, in my experience, had been a plumberless period, in which water flowed freely through the pipes of my house, and gushed obligingly from faucets at the touch of a finger. It was like an invisible brook; and, like a brook, I thought of it (if I thought of it at all) as going on forever. Nothing worse happened than a leak at the faucet. And when that happens I can fix it myself. All it needs is a new washer.

I run down cellar and turn off the water. I run up from the cellar and take off the faucet. I put in the new washer, which is like a very fat leather ring for a very thin finger, and screw on the faucet. I run down cellar, turn on the water, run up from the cellar, and look at the faucet. It still leaks. So I run down cellar, turn off the water, run up from the cellar, take off the faucet, make some slight alteration in the size, shape, or position of the washer, put on the faucet, run down cellar, turn on the water, run up from the cellar, and look at the faucet. If it *still* leaks (as is rather to be expected), I repeat as before; and if it *then* leaks (as is more than likely), I run down cellar, turn off the water, run up from the cellar, take off the faucet, make some slight alteration in the size, shape, or position of the washer, put on the faucet, run down cellar, turn on the water, run up from the cellar, and look at the faucet. Perhaps it leaks more. Perhaps it leaks less. So I run down cellar—and turn off the water—and run up from the cellar—and take off the faucet. Then, talking aloud to myself, I take out the new washer, throw it on the floor, stamp on it, kick it out of the way, put in a newer washer, put on the faucet, run down cellar, turn on the water, run up from the cellar, and look at the faucet. If (and this may happen) it still *leaks*, I make queer, inarticulate, animal noises; but I run down cellar, turn off the water, run up from the cellar, and take off the faucet. Then I monkey a little with the washer (still making those queer animal noises), put on the faucet, run down cellar, turn on the water, run up from the cellar, and look at the faucet. *Sooner or later the faucet always stops leaking.* It is a mere matter of adjusting the washer; any handy man can do it with a little patience.

Winter in the country is the time and place to get acquainted with the plumber. And I would have you remember, even in that morning hour when the ordinary life of your home has stopped in dismay, and then gone limping toward breakfast with the help of buckets of water generously loaned you by your nearest neighbor,—rarely, if ever, does he carry his generosity so far as to help carry the buckets,—that because of this honest soul in overalls, winter has lost the terrors which it held for your great-grandfather.

Revisit your library, and note what the chroniclers of the past thought about winter—'this cousin to Death, father to sickness, and brother to old age' (as Thomas Dekker bitterly called it; and well would your great-grandfather have agreed with him), when 'the first word that a wench speaks on your coming into a room in the morning is, "Prithee send for some faggots."' It is bad enough when—to adapt Dekker's sixteenth-century phraseology—the first word that a wench speaks on your coming into a room in the morning is, 'Prithee send for a plumber'; but how seldom it happens! And because we *can* send for a plumber, our attitude toward winter is joyfully changed for the better: lovely autumn is no longer regarded as melancholy because winter is coming, nor is backward spring esteemed beyond criticism because winter is over.

Those good old days, after the sun had entered Capricorn, were cold and inconvenient old days. Observe great-grandfather: all his plumbing was a pump, *which often froze beyond his simple skill in plumbery*; and then he drew water from the well in a dear old oaken bucket (as *we* like to think of it), emptied it into other buckets, and carried it by hand, even as a man now carries the water loaned him by his generous neighbor, wherever the useful, unintoxicating fluid was needed. No invisible brook flowed through his house, and gushed obligingly at faucets, hot or cold according to great-grandfather's whim; no hot-water pipes suffused his dwelling with grateful warmth. These are *our blessings*—and it is the plumber, with only a boy to help him, who contends manfully against the forces of nature, and keeps them going. For the life of the house depends nowadays on its healthy circulation of water; and when the house suffers from arteriosclerosis, the plumber is the doctor, and the strange, impassive boy is the trained nurse.

Sometimes in an emergency he arrives without this little companion: I have myself, rising to the same occasion, taken the boy's place. I was a good boy. The plumber admitted it. 'Fill th' kettle again with hot water off th' stove,' said he, over his arched back, as he peered shrewdly down a pipe to see how far away it was frozen, 'there's th' good boy.' Thus I know that the boy is not, as our minor humorists would have us believe, a mere flourish and gaudy appanage to the plumber's autocratically assumed grandeur. His strange, impassive manner is probably nothing more or less than concentrated attention; it is as if he said, with Hamlet, 'Yea, from the table of my memory I'll wipe away all foolish, fond regards, all saws of books, all forms, all pressures past, that youth and observation copied there; and thy commandment all alone shall live within the book and volume of my brain, unmixed with baser matter. Yes, by Heaven!'

Even in putting in a new washer, I should do better with a boy.

The most nervous and conscientious plumber, I tell you, must at intervals appear, to an observer unacquainted with the art and mystery of plumbery, to be proceeding in a leisurely and perhaps idle fashion. The most methodical and conscientious man, plumber or not, will occasionally forget something, and have to go back for it. The most self-

respecting and conscientious minor humorist, after he has exhausted his witty invention making a joke on a plumber, will try to sell it for the highest possible price. And if I, for example, am a little proud of my ability, greater than the plumber's, to write an essay, how shall I accuse him of arrogance if he is a little proud of his ability, greater than mine, to accomplish the more necessary feat of thawing a frozen water-pipe?

He has a heart.

When I was a plumber's boy myself, I walked with my boss to his office in the village to get a tool. It was a Sunday afternoon: I remember that a rooster crowed afar off, and how his lonely clarion enhanced and made more gravely quiet the peace of the Sabbath. And the plumber said, 'I wouldn't have *felt right*, sitting at home by the fire reading the paper, when I knew you was in trouble and I could pull you out.' He had come, mark you, in his Sunday clothes; he had come in his best, not pausing even for his overalls, so that, in our distressed, waterless home, the lady of the house had herself encircled his honest waist with a gingham apron before he began plumbing. And in all the world there was nobody else whom we would have been so glad to see.

And so, bowing, with my left hand over what I take to be the region of a grateful heart, I extend him this praise of plumber. No plumber came over in the Mayflower; but think not, for that reason, that he is a *parvenu*. He is of ancient lineage—this good fairy in overalls of our invisible brooks. The Romans knew him as the *artifex plumbareus*. Cæsar may have interrupted the revision of the *Commentaries* to send for him. He disappeared, with civilization and water-pipes, in the Dark Ages; he came back, with civilization and water-pipes, when the darkness lifted. Neglected by Art, disregarded by Romance, and unconsidered by the drama, these rich and entertaining expressions of life are as nothing when his presence is called for.

We may live without painters  
Or writers or mummers,  
But civilized man cannot  
Live without plumbers.

He, too, should have his statue, not of bronze, marble, or granite, but of honest lead, with two figures—the Plumber, holding aloft his torch, and the Plumber's Boy, strange, impassive, and holding in his pendant hands a monkey wrench and the coil of flexible tubing with which his master cunningly directs hot water into the hardened arteries of a suffering house. And on his pedestal I would carve the motto,—

'Did You Ever Know a Plumber Who Had Grown Rich?'

## THE HOME OF THE PORCELAIN TUB

'I AM very glad,' wrote Lord Chesterfield to young Mr. Stanhope, July 30, 1749, 'that my letter, with Dr. Shaw's opinion, has lessened your bathing; for, since I was born, I never heard of bathing four hours a day.'

Lord Chesterfield's surprise at the duration of his son's bath still leaves us wondering how that daily ablution was performed in 1749. Young Mr. Stanhope lived a long, long time before our Bath-Room Era, when every well-to-do home has a bath-room, and the daily bath is as natural a topic of conversation in polite society as the daily weather. He might, twenty years later, have gone to Dominicetti for the famous medicated bath which led Dr. Johnson to say to a gentleman who believed in it, 'Well, sir, go to Dominicetti, and get thyself fumigated, but be sure that the steam be directed at thy *head* for *that* is the *peccant part*.' Probably he bathed at home: a tin tub was brought by a menial into his apartment, filled with hot and cold water, tested for temperature, and the young man left alone with it. But, although this was better than no bath at all, it had serious disadvantages. When the water cooled, Mr. Stanhope had perforce to summon the menial, and either retire to his closet or remain sitting in his tub while the bath was reheated. Conventionally, I suppose, he was considered invisible to the menial. If he splashed he splashed on the carpet; and when the tub was carried away, however carefully, it left a damp spot. He had to hang his towel on one chair, and his clothes on another. His soap must have embarrassed him. According to all modern standards it was a makeshift kind of a bath.

We have changed all that. In every house is a bath-room, so much like the bath-room in every other house that a stranger guest feels more immediately at home there than anywhere else. We bathe daily, and talk about it in public: or, to be exact, many bathe, and even more talk. We have become skilled—I am referring, of course, to that important section of society whose members, often otherwise useless, all together establish the amenities of civilization—in leading conversation tactfully up to this topic. A few avoid it, but these are of a passing generation, and regard even the porcelain tub with disfavor. It is, so they say, dangerous: a treacherous, slippery contraption that you have to be careful getting in and out of. The mid-Victorian bath-room, with its *painted tin* tub built in by a carpenter, suits them better. If perchance their eyes fall on this essay, they will close the book hastily, perhaps destroy it, for *in their time* nice people did not talk, nor essayists write, about baths and bath-rooms. It was as much as ever if an author hinted, by some guarded, casual reference to soap when his hero came down to breakfast, that the dashing, well-groomed fellow had but just risen from a tub. Only heroes admittedly took morning baths. Occasionally a heroine may have—but wild horses couldn't have dragged the information out of her; and the boldest novelist would have held back from admitting that *he* knew anything about it. Indeed, how could he?

But a different point of view came in with the porcelain bath tub, which, as an advertisement so justly intimates, is less like a tub than like a great white china dish. One *had* to talk about it. It dignified the bath-room; it added beauty to bathing (which had hitherto depended entirely on the bather), and at the same time struck peremptorily that keynote of simplicity which has since remained the bath-room's distinguishing characteristic. The white purity of the tub forbids the introduction of any jarring note of unnecessary decoration: one cannot imagine a bath-room with pictures on the walls, a well-chosen bit of statuary in the window, and photographs on the shelf under the necessary mirror—except sometimes the photograph of the gentleman who invented the talcum powder. Even the rug that lies

in front of the tub is always inscribed BATH, yet here, if anywhere, the home of the porcelain tub might be given a touch of originality. Another motto might be substituted for BATH.—'Welcome, Bather.' 'Dine and the world dines with you; bathe, and you bathe alone.' 'I am always drier on the other side,' etc. But the bath-room, after all, is nobody's single possession, and the motto that pleased one bather might seem a false note to another. Perhaps it is wiser to stick to BATH, and rest content with providing at their best those commonplaces which would have seemed such luxuries to Mr. Stanhope—the soap (imagine his delight) *that floats*, and the shower (imagine his astonishment) that simulates the fall of rain from heaven. I am surprised, however, that no manufacturer of porcelain bath-tubs has yet thought to embellish his product with the legend in golden letters: 'One for All—and All for One.'

I am speaking, you understand, of the bath-room *ordinaire*. There are, I believe, bath-rooms *de luxe*, in which the bather, soap and sponge in hand, gravely descends white marble steps into the bath. I have never done this myself; but I can see that gravely descending marble steps has more personal dignity about it than the commoner method of entering the bath by climbing over the side of the tub. It is like a low white wall: and only a little imagination is necessary to feel that there may be a sign somewhere,—

No Bathing in This Tub.  
Police Take Notice.

But the gain is temporary. Sooner or later, in either case, the bather must sit down—and where then is his personal dignity? I have read also of bath-tubs *made of glass*: but here the effort to attain distinction is too transparent. And then there is a patent combination kitchen-and-bath-room: quite rare: I hardly know how to describe it: perhaps an excerpt from the unpublished novel 'Mary Brogan':—

'Mary felt tired, too tired to go out to the movies. The "words" that had passed between her and Mrs. Montgomery that morning, justified as Mary felt in her unwillingness to have another woman's child messing about in *her* kitchen—although smacking little Albert had perhaps been a too objective way of expressing this natural disinclination—had distressed a native refinement which it would have surprised haughty Mrs. Montgomery to be told was greater in her cook than in herself. Albert had been properly smacked, and there should have been an end of it. Nevertheless Mary Brogan felt tired. Was this all of life—smacking Albert and "rowing" with his mother? She finished washing and wiping the dishes slowly, put them away in the pantry, and sat down by the stove. It seemed as if there was really nothing left in the world that a girl could do to amuse herself.

'All at once, as if the friendly stove had suggested it, Mary remembered that this was her night to take a bath.

'Mary Brogan's kitchen was provided with a remarkable invention to economize space and encourage a hygienic habit. Most of the time it was a sink for Mary to wash the dishes, Monday it was a couple of convenient laundry tubs for Mary to wash the clothes, and once a week it was a fine large porcelain bath-tub for Mary to wash herself. Mary called it the "Three in Wan." She locked the doors and pulled down the window shades, so that she could neither be interrupted from within the house nor observed from without. And then, going to the sink, she turned the cosy kitchen into a laundry, and the laundry into a bath-room.'

Such bath-rooms, fortunately, remain exceptions to a desirable rule of uniformity. The bath-room *de luxe* is rare: it is possible that you, gentle reader, may gravely descend those marble steps, but it is very unlikely. Mary Brogan's bath-room (which, by the way, revives the colonial custom of bathing in the wash-tub) is a *tour de force* of invention that is obviously inconvenient for general family use. The *glass tub* is more dangerous. It appeals to the fancy with its indirect suggestion of Cinderella's slipper. Here and there already a householder has installed one; and the stranger guest feels stranger than ever when he takes a bath in it. One might get used to it, much as one would at first feel like a goldfish without room enough to swim; but there should be no rivalry between glass and porcelain. The tin tub passes: let the bath-tubs of the future be *all of porcelain* or *all of glass*.

Let us then tacitly agree to preserve the fine and simple integrity of the bath-room, with its slight, almost unnoticeable variations in wall-paper and the choice and arrangement of its normal impedimenta. Surely we do not want the home of the porcelain tub to express any single, compelling, individual personality: to say, in effect, 'I am H. Titherington Lee's bath-room,' or 'Betty Martin's,' rather than, as now, 'I am *the* Bath-Room.' Let Mr. Lee, if he will, have his initials, H. T. L., in gold on his tooth-brush: but let him not have them lettered on the white porcelain of the tub, or woven, instead of BATH, into the rug in front of it.

Uniformity, indeed, might comfortably be carried a little further, so that all bath-rooms should be equally warm and sunny of a winter's morning. One might think, sometimes, that people who build houses had considered the bath-room after everything else. The plans *seem* complete, and yet there is a vague conviction that something important has been left out. They go over them again and again, room by room: surely everything is as it should be—but the vague conviction still haunts them, and they have to put it out of their minds by force. The house is built: they move in, and somebody decides to take a bath. He starts for the bath-room. Presently his voice is heard, annoyed, astonished, and finally alarmed, anxiously shouting for the rest of the family. Together they go over the house from top to bottom. There *is* no bath-room! Luckily, on the coldest side of the house and far away from the furnace, there is a small hall bedroom intended for an emergency. The emergency has arrived: the hall bedroom is called for. In the shortest possible time the nearest plumber and carpenter make it over into a home for the tub.

But the ideal bath-room will have a southeasterly exposure, and the new-risen sun, that saw young Adam bathing in the Garden of Eden, will look cheerily in and add a sun bath. Place it not too near the guest chamber, for your guest is not sorry to be met on his way thither, clad in that gorgeous and becoming robe in which otherwise you will never see him. And do not clutter it, as some do, with extraneous objects. I remember a bath-room in which stood incongruously a child's rocking-horse. It gave the tub a kind of instability: and every time I looked at the rocking-horse, it *seemed to rock*.

**A**BOUT twenty-five years ago the late F. Marion Crawford came to lecture in a New England city: he was entertained in one of the most charming houses, given an afternoon reception, and led to the guest chamber, where he was left alone to rest until it should be time to appear at the lecture hall. It was an impressive guest chamber, furnished in rare colonial mahogany; but the day after, the family looked at it and suddenly wondered, with misgivings, how Mr. Crawford had managed his resting. He was an unusually tall, large man. Had he, they asked each other, rested on the dignified four-poster bed?—and if so, how considerately he had removed all traces of his little holiday! Or had he rested on either of the rare old colonial chairs—or both together, using one for his feet? They were a joy to look at, but hard, straight-backed, and unpromising resting places for a large literary man storing energy to deliver a lecture. Had he rested on the floor? It was a refulgently polished floor, but Mr. Crawford might have softened it by putting two of the rugs together and rolling up a third for a pillow. If so, how courteously he had restored the rugs to their normal positions! The final conclusion was that he had rested sitting bolt upright on one rare old colonial chair until he could bear it no longer, and then sitting bolt upright on the other. He never came back; but it was decided in the family that the next distinguished person left alone to rest in the guest chamber should at least have a rocking-chair.

At that period guests were not expected to stay in a guest chamber longer than was necessary to sleep, wash their faces and hands, brush their hair, and change their clothes. It was, literally, a spare room. If you came to visit, you were supposed to come because you wished to be with the family as much as possible, and only the most needful provision was made for your separate existence. If you were a lady, you *might* retire for a while in the daytime, and lie down on the bed. But no gentleman had this privilege: only at bedtime could he go to bed, unless unexpectedly taken so ill that he had to be put there, and the doctor sent for. The guest who left behind a suspicion of tobacco smoke in the lace curtains left also the suspicion that this was no gentleman—still more, no lady! Stern neatness and tidy utilitarianism characterized the guest chamber: its double bed must be comfortable, its bureau commodious, its wash-stand provided with fresh towels and a new cake of pleasingly scented soap. As for pictures and bric-à-brac—it was a fine place to store a present without offending the kind-hearted giver.

But this period is passing away: a new thought has come in, that the guest should feel at home, day *or* night, in the guest chamber, and human ingenuity is making the place so comfortable that it may soon be difficult to tempt guests out of it except at meal-times. Already, in some cases, it has become necessary to serve breakfast in the guest chamber. It is a home within a home, an apartment (with breakfast) of one or more rooms and bath, in which the temporary tenant pays no rent, lunches and dines with the family, and is expected (following the apartment hotel custom) to tip the house servants. There is, to use a shocking but expressive figure, one fly in his ointment—the extra and superfluous twin bed. He cannot escape from it. In the daytime it is a constant reminder that he is, after all, a stranger in a strange place; nor can he deceive himself with the idea that he keeps this extra cot for company. He *is* the company. In the night, if he happens to awake and turn on that side, it surprises and startles him with its suggestion of a ward in a hospital.

*But do not try to eliminate the extra bed by rolling the twins together. Sleeping, you will forget. And when, instinctively, you seek the middle of your luxurious couch, the twins (unless you have thought to bind them leg to leg with a couple of neckties) will separate, and you will be rather emphatically reminded of what you have done, by falling out of bed between them.*

I remember a guest chamber of the earlier régime in which the literary interests of the guest were catered to by an engraving of the desk at which Dickens wrote as it looked after Dickens was dead. Nowadays this is not sufficient. Books there must be, as well as a desk for the guest to write at while he is still alive, with plenty of stamps and stationery, ink, pens, pencils, rubbers, calendar, blotters, a bottle of mucilage, sealing-wax, candle, seal, dictionary, Thesaurus, and Mr. Bartlett's Book of Quotations. Here, indeed, is a little library in itself; but the books unfortunately are not such as the average guest is likely to pick up, with an exclamation of delight, and take to the fireside. Nor, if we confess the truth, does the guest often take much pleasure in the *classical* literature which his host often provides for him: he prefers his own meditations to those of Marcus Aurelius. Many persons can not read classical literature; and there is no little truth in the conclusion of the poet (first published in 'The Mother's Assistant, The Young Lady's Friend, and Family Manual,' Boston, 1852),—

When Caesar was a conqueror the Giraffe first was tamed,  
And for processions long and gay this creature then was famed;  
But no domestication kind could make him fit for use,  
And Nature's laws for us to thwart is manifest abuse.

Sooner or later some enterprising publisher will bring out the Guest-Chamber Book-Shelf, or Twenty-five Best Books for the Best Bedroom. Such a list would, of course, begin with the Bible and Shakespeare, and could then conscientiously settle down to business with twenty-three places left. A book of home exercises, illustrated with photographs of the same persistent gentleman in forty or fifty more or less ridiculous and amusing positions, is always interesting. A book of nature essays will hit some guests, and miss others. A book of poems to digest will sometimes entertain a guest. There should be several books of short stories by authors who appeal to different publics. And (I should say) the book you are now reading. Humor and novels might wisely be omitted. In the one case the guest may yield to a natural temptation, and retell at dinner, in his own words, the humorous narrative he has just been reading; and in the other there is a possibility that the visit will end before the novel. It becomes more difficult than ever to get the guest out of the guest chamber. As for magazines, they are desirable—but not too many of them, or the first glimpse of your guest chamber may unhappily remind the newcomer of the waiting room at his doctor's or dentist's.

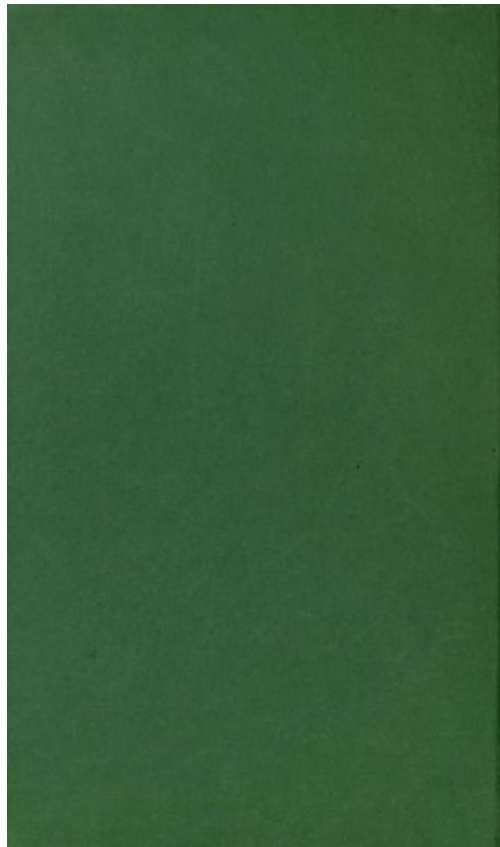
'My chamber,' wrote Washington Irving, describing in the 'Sketch Book' a contemporary English home, 'was in an old part of the house, the ponderous furniture of which might have been fabricated in the days of the giants. The room was panelled, with cornices of heavily carved work, in which flowers and grotesque faces were strangely intermingled, and a row of black-looking portraits stared mournfully at me from the walls. The bed was of rich, though faded damask, with a lofty tester, and stood in a niche opposite the bow-window.... The moonbeams fell through the upper part of the casement, partially lighting up the antiquated apartment.'

It is an odd thing about the guest chamber of the past, as we enter it by the door of literature, that it was so often gloomy: it is almost as if there has been a historic sequence of guest chambers: (1) those in which the guest was

afraid to sleep; (2) those in which he was willing to sleep; (3) those in which he was delighted to sleep. If there was a ghost on the premises, it was always likely to butt in (as we say nowadays) in the guest chamber. If there had been a particularly undesirable ancestor in the family, they always hung his portrait (probably to get rid of it) over the guest-chamber fireplace, where the moon could light it, and his sinister eye, *too natural to be painted*, could watch the guest trying to count himself to sleep. The guest-chamber chimney was peculiarly constructed: always the wind, carefully imitating its idea of a lost soul, sighed and wailed and shrieked in it. The floor was laid with a board that creaked aloud if but a mouse stepped on it; and the ivy was trained to tap-tap-tap like a finger on the window-pane. Often the guest chamber was the ghost chamber: and I, for one, am glad that it is not so any longer. For in proportion as the guest feels at home in the guest chamber, the ghost doesn't. And the complete *at-homeyness*—except for that one fly in the ointment, the extra twin bed—of our modern guest chamber makes the guest ghost-proof. He goes to bed and sleeps without a thought of ghosts, just as an English lady visiting an American family put her shoes outside the guest-chamber door, slept, and took them in again, with never a thought of her kind host polishing them in the cellar. He is haunted only by the thought that every minute brings him nearer the end of his visit.

*For go he must!* The hour was set, the train selected, even before his arrival; and, to make assurance doubly sure, another guest was probably invited. Truly I spoke without thinking when I said there was but one fly in his ointment: this Inexorable Fact is another and bigger one. Formerly the length of the visit took care of itself. The guest, always with the family except when asleep or dressing, reached the human limit of visiting at about the same time that the family reached the human limit of having him visit. Now and then an exception caused pain and embarrassment; but ordinarily they all reached their human limits with reasonable unanimity. A day came when the guest said he 'must go' to-morrow: the family said 'must he go' to-morrow—and to-morrow he went.

It is not so nowadays. The guest being settled in the guest chamber,—with its private bath and probably, sooner or later, its kitchenette,—he and the family are merely pleasantly conscious of each other: he might stay on and on, in a kind of informal and happy adoption, until death or matrimony intervened and took him away. But the family, unless they kept on adding to the house, would have no guest chamber: and other things being equal, constant building is an annoyance. And so, wisely, the host or hostess specifies in advance the length of the visit; and the extra little twin bed is a useful symbol and reminder of its impermanency.



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