

# SPRING CLEANING

By  
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I house-clean, thou house-cleanest, she house-cleans;  
we house-clean, ye or you house-clean, they house-clean.

WE have been at it, so have you, or if not you will be very soon, or you ought to be. All the best families are doing it this year in spite of the war. Once more the merry sounds of the carpet-beater and the vacuum-cleaner are heard in the land, and it is pleasant to see your neighbour's drawing-room furniture standing shamelessly on the front verandah—pictures, piano-lamp, potted palm, sofa and all. We can form an opinion of those we have never met, from their taste in cretonnes.

There are different methods of procedure in the anything-but-gentle art of housecleaning. You may wage one terrific battle for a week or more against dust and dirt and moths, or you may carry on a series of sharp attacks, taking one room at a time and extending the assault over the period of a month. In any case, you emerge into an atmosphere of peace and calm and cleanliness and taste the bliss that the battle-weary soldier feels on finding himself between the cool, clean sheets of a hospital cot.

DURING this trying period, a strong arm, coupled with a total lack of imagination, is desirable. The chaste disciple of William Morris will have no qualms in discarding all articles she neither knows to be useful nor believes to be beautiful, but if you allow sentiment to keep you from burning your early love-letters and the bunch of faded flowers . . . then so much the worse for you next year!

If you are endowed with the power of seeing uses to which various articles may be put in the dim future, it is equally disastrous, for at this time more than any other do we realize the truth of the saying:

"A man's happiness consists not in the multitude of goods that he possesses."

Quite the contrary! How easy a task spring cleaning must have been before rugs, window-glass, and upholstered furniture were invented!

FOR some of us the annual event has been simplified this year by the numerous patriotic superfluities sales held during the winter. Old silver ornaments and broken bracelets, umbrella handles, and odd cuff-links have vanished gratefully into melting-pots. Gilt chairs that "looked a perfect sight" with the rest of our furniture brought quite a respectable sum at a "White Elephant" sale, and we hope and pray that the donors of wedding presents did not recognize their scorned gifts. The donations have seldom involved any sacrifice. There have been few attempts to raise money in Canada by sacrificing our most treasured possessions. In England each spring a mammoth sale of antiques is held at Christie's, when hundreds of thousands of dollars are raised for the Red Cross. The King has this year donated a Chinese bowl made in 1100 B.C. The Queen has given a Chinese coverlet—a striking mural decoration—and a jewelled pendant, and the Duchess of Connaught, before her death, selected a Louis Quinze parquetry commode as her gift. A vivacious portrait of Lloyd George, by Sir Luke Fildes, R.A., is one of the features of the sale. Another picture which will fetch an enormous sum is "The Plough," by Frederick Walker, A.R.A., painted in 1870. The picture represents two peasants in the glow

of the setting sun,  
and the  
artist has

achieved renown not only through his genius, but also because he is known to be the original "Little Billee" in Du Maurier's "Trilby." Each of the 2,132 articles are of undoubted value and represent real sacrifice on the part of the owner, for the gifts have, as a rule, a sentimental value due to long possession.

It is only when conducted by a firm with a wide reputation like Christie's that such a sale is possible. It would be foolish to give things of great intrinsic value to our rummage sales, where no one would realize their worth, and so we send only the things we can easily spare. But even with these patriotic inducements to diminish the contents of our store-closets, housecleaning remains a time of mental as well as physical stress for sentimental souls and for those who are cursed with the instinct of hoarding.

THE best cure for this habit, I am told, is to live in a small apartment without a store-room or an inch of superfluous closet space, but it has been my fate to live in an old-fashioned house with any amount of cupboards and chests of drawers, so the temptations are manifold and housecleaning continues to be a difficult proposition.

Knowing my weakness, I quailed before the charwoman's contemptuous eye as she pointed the end of her broom at my most cherished possessions and said:

"What in the world do you keep all that truck for?"

I carefully folded my grandmother's worn lace shawl and my mother's yellowing wedding-gown and replied in my most dignified manner:

"These are quite valuable old things, Mrs. Beatem."

She sniffed contemptuously.

"Well, I wouldn't have all that old stuff cluttering up my house—not on a bet! Why don't you sell them, if they're valuable, and give the money to the Red Cross? Or give the things to those swell young ladies that drive the waste collection motors!"

I LOOKED in my treasure box again. Judged by her standards a great deal of the contents was certainly "truck." There is a saying that if you keep something for seven years it will "come in handy," and I have found this to be true. One of my greatest pleasures as a small child was to play at tableaux—"Living Pictures" we call them now. Our favourite representation was "The Sleeping Beauty," and for this the old white satin gown and orange blossoms were deemed essential. Seven years later they were worn at a fancy dress party, and in another seven a member of the younger generation was wearing her mother's wreath of orange blossoms; though they looked rather sallow against the crisp tulle veil. I confiscated the orange blossoms, but the gown. . . . As satin it was worthless, for the voluminous skirt was cut and stitched with many frills and furbelows. Too many appearances in the character of "Sleeping Beauty" had spoiled its sale as a studio property, and even if cleaned and repaired it was not sufficiently handsome to find a place in a collection of period gowns. The best village dressmaker in those days did not import models direct from Paris.

Neither was my own "coming out" gown marketable. I had put it away at the end of my first season, thinking,

"Ourselves shall from Dame Fashion's dusty shelves assist our children in their costume balls."

Two charming young ladies in khaki  
carried off my possessions.

But just as I had scorned to wear my mother's antiquated wedding gown to a masquerade, preferring a modern adaptation of the crinoline, to an authentic specimen of the bustle period, so my descendants will doubtless scorn this tight-waisted "creation" in which I was once said to look—oh, just the usual thing that is said about all debutantes!

I put it in the scrap heap, also a shell-covered box, a fan with broken sticks of carved ivory and a wide-eyed wax doll nearly sixty years old, once considered quite a beauty. Then there was my grandmother's inlaid writing desk, filled with letters in faded ink. I intend to read them some day—I have meant to do so for twelve years or more, but I only dust the bundles each spring-time and register a vow that I will burn my letters—yes, every one—as soon as they are answered. I might burn grandmother's unread, did not the plots of so many stories hinge on such indiscretions.

MY own wardrobe looked more promising. An old clothes dealer could certainly dispose of some of my superannuated coats and dresses, half soles would make the boots wearable—and yet in these days of thrift ought one to discard the things that might come in useful some day? And so they accumulate.

Regarding the ornaments I was very severe. "Is it useful; is it beautiful?" I asked myself as I cleaned and dusted each article, and under this examination the junk pile in the cellar grew and I reflected with satisfaction on the pleasure with which the Salvation Army man had carried off my comparatively small collection of last year. Then I remembered that this year two charming young ladies in khaki would appropriate it for the Red Cross, and this seemed a very small offering indeed.

But the charming young ladies were neither scornful of my accumulated superfluities, nor impressed with their value. They were most business-like in the manner in which they sorted and packed away my possessions. The little blue vase did not bring to them the vision of my first boy lover, they didn't know that the chipped China candlesticks were purchased with money for the first story I had ever sold. It seemed to me they were carrying away precious bits of my life. . . . Yet I only looked at them once a year!

Perhaps, if I am very careful in the future to discard everything as soon as it ceases to be useful or beautiful, I shall find time to go through the little inlaid writing desk belonging to my grandmother and discover a legacy hidden between the thin, yellow leaves of her letters!

She has left me one legacy already—the magpie love of hoarding.

