

THE HOUSEWIFE'S ASSISTANTS

Some of the Mechanical Aids in Modern Housekeeping

INVENTION has been called the offspring of necessity. Certainly, it seems, in reviewing the history of the many inventions which have smoothed the human pathway, the need for them has ever been near the source of their development. For the last half century, women have been deploring the scarcity of domestic help. Some of us can remember the time when a "girl" received four or five dollars a month and did the washing. Now, the housewife, in any of our Canadian cities, considers herself fortunate if she can secure the most inexperienced maid for two dollars a week—and, of course, the washing is not included in such an assistant's work. We may as well admit that the girl of Canadian birth is extremely reluctant to enter the field of domestic service. She prefers the factory or the shop nearly every time. She may be foolish in doing so, but that is another matter for discussion. In the country, the condition is not much better, and the cry of the modern household goes up for "merely Mary Ann."

The scarcity of domestic help, however, appears to have set many to work inventing appliances which will make the work lighter for the woman who is obliged to go without help—either because she cannot secure competent assistance or cannot afford to hire it. To look at some of these modern inventions and consider their working will convince the most sceptical that there is something "in" the aids of the day's work. There is a certain stubborn type of woman who has a curious conviction that there is a virtue in working beyond the point of exhaustion and that it is quite commendable to stand during a whole afternoon to accomplish an ironing, that it is sinful laziness to use a machine for the purpose of saving feminine nerves and strength. They consider it industry and fortitude to "keep at it until they are ready to drop," and when they finally do "drop," some more sensible woman comes along and reaps the reward of their unremitting toil. Now, it is a waste of time to talk to the stubborn woman. She is convinced that "the old ways are good enough for her" and advice or "demonstration" of any order would be wasted. Consequently, it is to the wide-awake, open-minded housewife that we must appeal—the woman who does not wish to shirk any part of the day's toil, but who is willing to observe the practical economy of achieving the maximum result by the minimum effort.

There is no question that the great ordeal of the week used to be wash day. It meant a smell of suds, a chilliness pervading the house and "scraps" for dinner. Everyone was glad when wash day was over and the clothes were out on the lines. A sigh of relief went up on Monday afternoon, and the housewife regarded her shrivelled fingers with the wish that Monday was like Christmas and would come but once a year. Now, it is questioned openly whether it be wisdom to choose Monday for laundry operations. Leaving that question aside, we come to the modern operation of the washing machine—which naturally followed the advent of the wringer. By the simple turning of the handles of this most valuable "assistant," the old, tiresome work of rubbing is almost entirely obliterated—and, what is more important, the work is much more efficiently done than by manual labor.

The back-breaking process of bending over the tubs, which laid the foundation of much suffering and led to complaint of "cricks" in the back, is done away with, when the clothes are placed in the cleansing care of the machine which operates so surely and so swiftly.

"But it must tear the clothes," someone will object.

Not nearly so much as the old method, since one "rub" by the machine drives out more dirt than half-a-dozen efforts by human fingers. There is a great saving of time by resorting to the modern machine, since the washing is completed in a third of the time taken by old-time ways, and there are hours now to be given to other and less laborious tasks. The machine presents no complicated arrangement which may not be understood by even the children of the household, and the muscular energy involved in its use is of a moderate character, and no strain whatever on a housekeeper of ordinary health and strength.

THE vacuum cleaner has progressed with such strides in popular favor that it will soon be difficult to find a home without one. Its latest use is for the cleaning of churches and the various "Ladies' Aids" throughout the country are not slow to appreciate the advantages of this method of "getting rid of the dust." The way in which many of our churches have been kept is a disgrace to the congregations, who seem to have forgotten that it was John Wesley, or some equally wise theologian, who declared that cleanliness is next to godliness. There is much truth in the saying that God helped to build the churches, but Satan helps to take care of them. Fresh air seems to be the last requirement which the average sexton takes into consideration, while church carpets and cushions are left to accumulate dust and to become a happy hunting-ground for germs of all descriptions. The ordinary cleaning simply meant that the dust was temporarily disturbed, to settle somewhere else in the edifice. The vacuum cleaner does what the best broom, aided by tea-leaves has not yet accomplished—it "removes" the dust and actually cleans the apartment to which it is applied.

Its general use in the household, to simplify the labor of sweeping day, is only a matter of time, and to see it in operation is to realize what a deal of effort has been wasted in the past in the housekeeper's war against dust.

The question has been asked whether the vacuum cleaner is not "hard" on furniture and carpets. The testimony of expert

users is quite to the contrary. Of course, like everything else, there is a "way" of doing it, which leads to clean and shining success, and a way of not doing it, which results in more or less confusion. Those who are determined to see the good works of the vacuum cleaner need devote very little time and patience to learn the ways and means of this marvel-working machine.

The hygienic aspect should always be considered carefully. The old-fashioned sweeping had much to do with the weak lungs which afflicted the woman who indulged in it every day. There was an old school building which was looked after by a widow and her three daughters in one of our small Ontario towns. A venerable physician, speaking not long ago of these three girls remarked: "Every one of them died of tuberculosis—and it is my firm belief that it was the constant sweeping of all those wooden floors with the accumulated dirt from hundreds of small feet which sent them to an early grave."

It is not necessary to be on the watch continually for the deadly germ and to be dreading its ravages; but every common-sense precaution should be taken, in guarding against disease. For generations we have suffered from epidemics which might have been avoided by a little ordinary care and precaution. In our housekeeping, we wish to have the maximum of cleanliness with the minimum of dust-raising. Towards this ideal, the vacuum cleaner has contributed materially, and will continue to bring about that dustless era which writers about the city of the future are so fond of describing.

In some communities several housewives unite in buying a cleaner and "go shares" in both its expense and its use. This is an excellent idea when the buyers are all well acquainted and are willing to make mutual concessions, as to time and convenience. But most women prefer to possess their own cleaning apparatus, and, as time goes on, each housewife will desire her exclusive cleaner, as, in former days, she demanded her own broom or "carpet sweeper." At the annual convention of the Women's Institute there is usually a "demonstration" of the vacuum cleaner which proves to the most skeptical the value of the machine.

THE saving of steps in the kitchen has become a study with those who are interested in the economy of domestic labor, and, in this respect, the kitchen cabinet has gone farther towards reducing toil of this nature than any other invention. The old-time cupboard with its multitude of receptacles was at best a clumsy arrangement, with cumbersome drawers and a lack of smaller receptacles for the less common spices.

The kitchen cabinet brings together all the essentials of cooking and supplies the housewife with a multitude of ready-marked small receptacles for "sugar and spice and everything nice." Then there is the bake-board at hand and the rolling-pin of latest design and style. There is no running from cupboard to shelves, no wondering "where in the world I can have put that baking powder tin" or "what can have become of the ginger?" Just as the secretary fulfils all the writer's mechanical needs, in providing pens, paper, pencils, sealing-wax, and the multifarious demands of the modern scribe, so the kitchen cabinet plays the part of a culinary secretary and furnishes the receptacle from which comes forth a "poem," in the form of a pie or a batch of biscuits. From the ornamental standpoint, also, the kitchen cabinet is eminently to be desired, in comparison with former conditions. It is usually constructed on simple and graceful lines, making a pleasing article of furniture.

SOME years ago a novel was written which pictured an ideal city, clean and convenient, and without the curse of slums or poverty. "Looking Backward" was considered an absurd dream, at the time it was written, but many of its prophecies have come true. Among the latter is the extensive use of electricity as a labor-saver in the home. As a New York writer says:

Several years ago scientists noted that electricity was the only form of energy which could be instantly changed into heat with practically no loss. This led to the development of the electric cooking devices which are so common to-day. As electricity is the one form of power which can be carried to any old place with little loss and applied in motors small enough for a watch charm or capable of six thousand horse power, so it is the most flexible form of heat. It can be instantly made to warm a plate, or the same pressure of a finger will let loose energy enough to boil a quart of diamonds or to melt a block of solid concrete.

The cost of electric cooking with a rate of six cents a kilowatt hour will not be over that of a good hard coal range and it is vastly more convenient than any kind of coal fire, where coal has to be carried, ashes removed and fires kindled. In one family of two the entire cooking and baking was done by electricity at a cost of \$3.12 a month. Another family of three cooked with electric heat at a monthly cost of \$4.32. The electric flat-irons can be operated for less than five cents an hour; a pot of coffee costs one cent to brew over the invisible fires; ten slices of bread can be toasted on the dining room table for one cent; the chafing dish can be run for four cents an hour; the tea kettle will boil an hour for five cents; the disk stove will keep sizzling hot for one hour for six cents; for three cents the corn popper will work one hour; the heating pad will remain warm for two hours for a single copper; seven cents will broil a large steak; the baby's milk can be warmed half a dozen times for a cent, and so on down a long list.