

FIRE PREVENTION IN THE HOME

Some Good Advice for the Householder, Housebuilder and Housekeeper—Role of Carelessness

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A distinguished Englishman, Mr. A. J. Balfour, once said in reviewing the rise and fall of civilizations, that the hope of the future lay in the popularizing of scientific knowledge. That observation strikes the keynote of fire prevention which in an academic sense is impotent for good until it is made an integral part of the popular intelligence. Fire prevention is merely the science of commonsense and its application does not call for heroic measures or revolutionary methods. All that is demanded is education.

It is strange, but withal interesting, to note that in all lasting reforms the masses have to be compelled to do certain things by authority; the authorities in turn only apply compulsory measures by the weight of public opinion; and public opinion is moulded by the few who think, who are public spirited enough to publish their thoughts, and insistent enough to stick to a point until it is won. When the people are fully awakened they are not easily befuddled into somnolence again, and if I am able to sense the future correctly, such an awakening is about to take place in Canada. Without posing as a prophet, I confidently predict that within five years the "fire specialist" will be one of the most important factors in our communal life, and healthy legislation will hedge about the all-important question of fire waste.

The voice of the apostle of conservation is beginning to be heard in the land and his message cannot but engage the attention of every good citizen. It is eminently proper that we should guard our foaming waterfalls with their potential energy, the hidden wealth of our great northland, the fertile resources of our alluvial plains, and our magnificent forests that stretch back to the eternal snows. But what will it profit, if the wealth won from forest, field and mine is to become a sacrifice to the god of fire, and the gigantic oak and majestic pine but fuel for the flames?

There is only one answer. Let every man proclaim the truth from the house-tops. Talk fire prevention unceasingly, upon every conceivable occasion, to every person with whom conversation, argument or importunity is possible. Do not restrict the message to the market-place and the street, for it is peculiarly a woman's question and a children's question. Fire prevention, like charity, should begin at home.

Four Thousand Dwellings Destroyed.

Canada is the land of homes. They tell us that we built over 11,000 dwellings during the year 1913 and that seems like rapid progress. But remember, our records also show that fire destroyed or damaged almost 4,000 in the same period. Your chance of suffering loss is just one in three hundred and seventy-seven. Insurance may partly reimburse you, but how many things are there you could never replace. And what assurance have you that human lives may not also pay the penalty? One hundred and eighty-one lives were lost in dwelling fires last year, or an average of one for every twenty-two homes that were ravaged by the flames.

The question of fire prevention is of paramount importance in the home. The record of fatalities proclaims with no uncertain voice the narrow margin of safety we each enjoy. In spite of all that modern fire protection can do, it cannot save lives if fire is under strong headway. A fire brigade in every street would not alleviate conditions in any large measure. The trouble is with the houses and the careless people who inhabit them.

The majority of men and women cling to the mistaken idea that the moment they have outside walls of brick or stone they are immune from the dangers of fire. They little realize that the wooden floor joists, the partitions and all the interior finish constitute vulnerable points for fire to attack, and that the hidden spaces between the rafters, floors and partition studdings are merely flues to spread the flames. No sooner is there a little fire in the cellar, or kitchen, or some out of the way corner than—*poof!*—there it is up the stairway, and into the roof, and all through the house. Elaborate wood trimming and fixtures, flimsy furnishings and highly inflammable decorations added to "jerry-built"

structures make a combination surpassing anything that ingenuity could otherwise devise.

Safety first is a motto that needs to be emphasized in the building, furnishing and care of the modern home. Ignorant of possibilities, our women, the home-builders of the nation, instinctively turn to combustibles as a cat to cream. The average woman wants three times as many rooms in a house as she can possibly get for the money, or use when she has them and innumerable closets, cubby-holes and cosy-corners without rhyme or reason. Her artistic soul cries out for bizarre effects in tortured, scroll-sawed wood and flimsy gew-gaw decorations, and she has never learnt the lesson that a combustible interior is to a solid brick, fireproof exterior, what cheap calico trimming would be to a beautiful silk dress. It is the acme of inconsistency, for every speck of wood or other combustible material that enters into a house adds in a measurable degree to the possibilities of fire.

The first great principle of fire prevention in the home is to give fire nothing to burn. The average house of to-day is an ideal cinder-box. The house is woman's especial province, and such is her intelligence, that let her but once see the folly of the card-board box home and feel her responsibility for safeguarding its possessions, and she will count fire prevention of equal importance to extended suffrage and domestic economics, the two questions that visibly burden her gentle soul to-day.

What is Good Construction?

The heart-breaking part of it all is, the mistaken ideas abroad in regard to good construction. People think, when they think at all about it, that a fireproof home is something for the wealthy and that wood is the only thing within the average reach. Thirty years ago wood was an economy, to-day it is a luxury, but always it has been a menace. A first-class fireproof house costs initially only eight or ten per cent. more than the ordinary joist construction. Yet there are less than one hundred and fifty fireproof homes in Canada.

Without delving too deeply into technical details, or figures and descriptions, the ideally perfect dwelling may be outlined as follows:

Outer walls of stone, brick or hollow tile laid like brick, or covered with stucco, pebble dash, or cement coating for effect. Floors, partitions, etc., of tile, or cement if it is desired to eliminate some of the steel framing. Roof covered with slate, metal or asbestos shingles that, by the way, look exactly like wood. Floor finish of cement, pulp, compo, cork or rubber, polished ready for rugs or left like wood floor. Stairways of metal, hollow tile, or concrete, preferably with self-closing doors. Doors and interior finish of hollow pressed steel; panelled wainscoting, ceiling beams and other decorative features also of steel imitating in triple enamel the various woods. Window sash of metal, and if near narrow alleys and neighboring houses, the windows should be glazed with wire glass.

Good House is Good Investment.

Such a house would be perfect. Surely fireproof partitions daintily papered or colored, plastic or composition floors and steel doors, are just as livable, just as attractive, as the wooden wainscoting, wooden beamed ceiling, and oiled and polished wooden floors that now seem the zenith of our ambitions. If we must have the artistic effects of rare woods we can obtain steel finished exactly in color, texture and polish, the same as mahogany, rosewood, oak or any other combustible material.

Moreover, such a dwelling is a good and permanent investment. Repairs on wood begin at once and grow steadily; a fireproof house is practically without decay. It is warmer in winter and cooler in summer, it is absolutely vermin proof, and while externally conflagration proof, any internal fire could only consume the contents of one room. At the end of five years the fireproof house will be found to have cost less than one built of wood. The ordinary type of dwelling is a "risk" from the start, costly, and the worst of extravagances; and yet it is the one indulged in by those whose homes are often their only capital.

Unfortunately, the mistakes of the past cannot be corrected in a moment and the "jerrybuilt" structures in which we live cannot be transformed by some magic incantation into perfect buildings.

As the first principle of fire prevention is to have nothing that will burn, the second is careful housekeeping. All fires are of the same size at the beginning and every match is an illegitimate child of the god of fire. Every fire that