

The Reign of Beauty

Do you remember the good old days of home-manufacture? A young farmer rose from his home-made bunk, washed himself with the aid of water and home-made soap, donned a suit of home-spun woollen and went down to a breakfast of home-cured bacon and home-grown vegetables. He took up an axe with a home-made handle, and proceeded to fell some home-grown timber, which he used in making some implement or conveyance for use in his work. Meantime his wife was busy making cheese, butter, candles, starch and bread or it might be blankets, quilts, and clothing, while the children were carving out toys from pop-gun wood and used-up spools. Those good old days were full of work and the hours of leisure were few and precious. Yet amid all the rush and worry the good grandmother had always time to beautify the thing she created. Was it an apple pie? Then it was not complete until her fingers had circled the plate—leaving behind a row of scallops as even as the fluting on a Corinthian pillar. Was it a woollen sock? Then she had time to vary the yarn so that while the general effect was gray, the toe and heel were white, and there was a white band at the top. So too the grandfather had time to add a few beautiful but useless curves to his axe-handle, and even a few meaningless carvings to the parts of a common flail. And as for the children—did ever a girl make a doll of the humblest type without attempting to beautify it with ribbons and lace and did ever a boy come into possession of a book without writing on it his name supplemented by various flourishes and diagrams that in his mind were the acme of beauty?

BEAUTY IN NATIONAL LIFE.

This worship of beauty has not been limited to individuals. The savage has always allowed decoration to precede dress. Tattooing, painting with pigments, decorating with rings and jewels, have been signs of pre-eminence. Assyria, Egypt, Greece, Italy, Spain and each in its turn has prided itself on its devotion to beauty. That which remains behind as their greatest legacy is their production in art. The Appollo Belvidere, the Sistine Madonna are types of that which will never die. The buildings that one wishes to visit in Europe are not those which have cost most money, but those which contain most beauty of finish and design. St. Peter's, St. Paul's, the Cathedrals of England and the Continent—these are what attract the thousands. And if further proof were needed of the permanence and attractiveness of beauty, he has but to stand at the entrance to the great Art Galleries of the world, and to take note of the numbers who come to see and to learn.

BEAUTY IN THE HOME.

There should be beauty and refinement in the home. They should be manifest in speech, dress, manner and personal appearance, in decoration and equipment. Indeed, they should extend to every form of life-activity, if home is to be attractive and helpful. Why should a man use the coarsest expressions that come to his lips? Why should his wife indulge in harsh, biting criticism? Why should the atmosphere of scandal continually surround the little ones? That which will commend the home to childhood is the spirit of kindness, moderation and gentleness. A boy is not to be blamed if he wishes to leave a home in which he is forced to listen to a constant battle of words.

The wise parent is just as careful in matters of dress as in matters of speech. A little ribbon for the hair, a brass button or two, a little

bit of insertion, to a young child, mark the difference between meanness and grandeur. They change dislike to admiration.

The mother who takes time to smooth her hair in the morning, who always has a kiss for her children on sending them to school and a smile for them on their return, exercises a vastly different influence to the woman who is careless about her personal appearance, whose dress is coming to pieces and whose table manners are coarse and vulgar. So, too, when it comes to the equipment and decoration of a home. There is all the difference possible between dishes of a coarse type thrown recklessly upon a table, and dishes of chaste design tastefully arranged. There is as marked a difference between cheap over-colored pictures suspended on the walls close to the ceiling and modest copies of classical master-pieces tactfully arranged so as to fill the vacant spaces with visions of beauty. Nor is it all a matter of cost in many of these things. Many a lowly cottage in its simple fittings is more completely endowed than the mansions of the wealthy.

Yet, I hear a good woman say she has no time for the niceties of life, that with seventeen cows to milk and chores innumerable to perform, she does well if she gets through a day's work in any fashion. There is little time on the farm to give to admiration of the beautiful; few moments to spend on the ornamental when so much attention must be given to the useful. The answer to this is self-evident. Sixteen cows and a happy, well-trained family are of more account than seventeen cows and a group of unhappy children, who are unfit company for one another and incapable of service in society. And when children grow up and can look back upon their childhood, when they are old enough to value what their parents have done for them, their first thanksgiving will not be for that seventeenth cow, but for the example set in all that makes for loveliness and beauty in thought, word and deed.

But it is not the mother who is usually the chief Mammon-worshipper. There are not a few men like the old Kansas farmer, who bought land to raise corn, to feed hogs, to get money, to buy more land, to raise more corn, and so on, forever. Within his small circle there was nothing of the human or of the divine. It is bad enough for a man to throw away his own life, but it is a crime when he reduces to his own level, both his wife and his children. It is passing strange, that a young man who searched the neighborhood and went beyond it to find a wife with the charm of beauty and with accomplishments to match it, should with advancing years, allow himself to degenerate into a creature without refinement of feeling and holy motive. And it is almost incredible that he should attempt to reduce her he professed to love, to a condition of practical servitude. If a man is true to his better self, he will determine that whether he amasses wealth or remains in comparative poverty he will never, either for himself, or for those dependent upon him, forsake the pursuit of truth, beauty and goodness.

TWO FAMILIAR ILLUSTRATIONS.

There come to my mind, two homes that I visited recently. In the first one everything was disjointed. Try to picture this:—a littered floor, greased furniture, stained rugs, dirty boots, clothes hanging on the chair backs, torn clothes, stale tobacco, smell of cabbage, bad temper, grimy walls, stained pictures, broken chairs, dishes thrown on tables, and everything else in harmony or rather, out of harmony. The boy's room was a veritable den, with not a ray of cheer. It was enough to drive an ordinary being into the wilds. And

yet, the parents were well-to-do, in a financial way. But they had ceased to follow "the gleam." The other home was a sweet little cottage painted in white and green. There was a neat garden in front and the lawn was inviting. Two or three benches were placed under the shade of the trees. Inside, everything was neat and clean. The books were nicely arranged on the shelves, the pictures were chaste and instructive, the table clean and attractive. The speech of the parents and children was mild and gentle and in harmony with their personal appearance. The bedrooms were resting-places not only for the tired bodies, but for eyes and brains. The boy on entering his little room, regarded it as his own peculiar kingdom. It was a home no boy would wish to leave. It was a home which in one sentence answered the question "How are we to keep the boys on the farm?"

BEAUTY IN THE SCHOOL.

Beauty in the home—yes! There must also be beauty in the school. As one drives up and down the country he has a feeling of despair as he gazes upon the buildings and grounds set apart for purposes of education. With few exceptions, the grounds are unfenced, and without trees and gardens. The architecture of the building is unworthy of a name, and the inside fittings are disgraceful. When it is remembered that children spend almost half their waking hours in school, it is not too much to urge that the building should be made attractive and cheerful. A few pictures, a suitable library, a table with a proper covering, a few comfortable chairs, blinds and curtains, and such equipment as any school should have—all these can be had at a cost that will not mean more than a few cents to each ratepayer. The value to the school will be untold. And if a caretaker is provided who will believe cleanliness is a virtue, the school will stand for something in the community. Sometimes it seems as if parents were playing at this matter of educating their children. If it is worth doing at all, it is worth doing well. In the coming days when men and women read of us and our times they will wonder how we existed when we made no provision for the teaching of music and art, and generally for aesthetic culture. In those days the schools will be true homes: Parents will be more anxious to give their children the treasure which cannot be taken away than that which perisheth with the using.

A TYPICAL CASE.

I was in a school recently, and this is what I saw—a neat little building freshly painted, in a ground properly fenced and treed. Flower gardens there were and the pansies planted by the children were in full bloom. The floor of the building had been recently painted and was as clean as a polished table. The walls were covered with oil-cloth and had evidently been washed. There were on the walls half-a-dozen simple but pretty pictures, well-mounted and placed. In one corner was an organ and in another, a book-case with a suitable library that was in constant use. The desks were clean and well-kept. The teacher's desk was covered with a cloth of attractive pattern and on it was a vase of flowers. Both, teachers and pupils were neat in person, and in their speech and actions showed that they experienced the delight of living. Their work seemed to them as joyous as play. It was as if Heaven had come to earth for a single day. This school, like one of the homes described seemed to answer in a single sentence the ever-recurring question "How are we to keep the children in the country?"