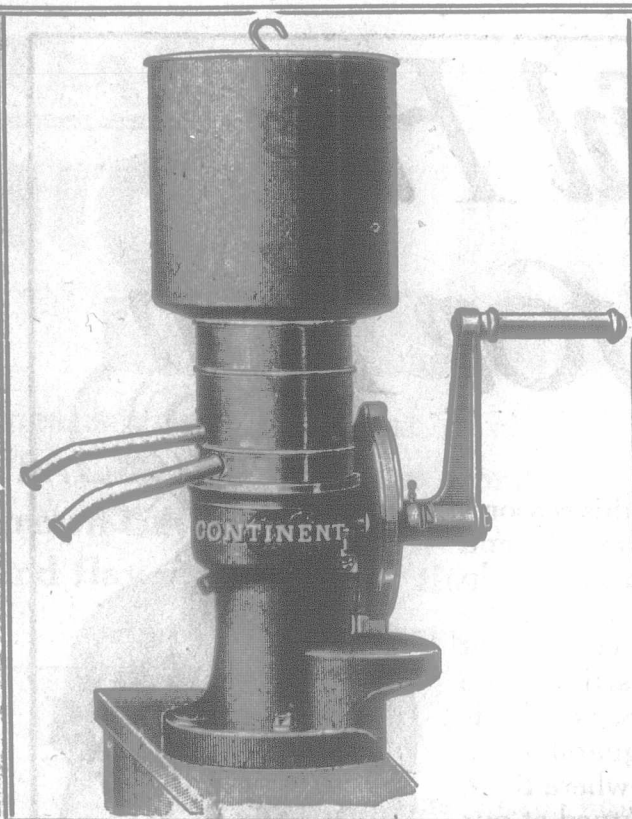




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ties. Once they did this as far as such things may, but the easy sociality of the family board has almost ceased, and the average club has so expanded that it savors more of hotel freedom than home cosiness.

"I am not a misanthrope or a woman hater, as you know, yet from what I gather I fear that, in the upper middle class at least, it is the women who are responsible for this increased formality that most men naturally would avoid. Led by personal ambition, or that of young daughters, they seek to maintain a standard just enough beyond their easy grasp to feel ill at ease, if not humiliated, to be caught off guard. I remember once when I was a mere boy hearing my father say in a sorrowing tone to my older sister, who was giving fugitive reasons for not being able to array herself quickly for some festivity for which the invitation had been delayed, yet to which she longed to go. 'Wherever woman enters socially, then complications begin that are wholly of her own making. I warrant before Eve had finished her fig-leaf petticoat she was bothering Adam to know if he thought there could be another woman anywhere who had a garment of rarer leaves than her own.'

"The clubs do somewhat better, being under male management, but those among them that ranked as so conservative that membership was the hall mark of intellectual acquirements and stamped a man as either author, artist, or amateur of letters and the fine arts, have had their doors pushed open by many of those who wish to wear in public the name of being without good right, and so the little groups of kindred spirits have broken away, the authors in one direction, the followers of the drama of habitations of their own, artists who are too independent to be overborne by money in another, and thus the splitting spirit increases until it vanishes in a maze of cliques and coteries. The names may stand on the lists, the faces are absent, and one must wander through half a dozen clubs to really meet the aggregation of thinkers and workers of the grade who gathered in the snug corners of the Century's old club house in East Fifteenth Street when we were young fellows, and my father secured us cards for an occasional monthly meeting as the greatest favor he could do us.

"Come down if you can, take a holiday, or rather night, and go with me to the January meeting, and we will also stroll among some of our old haunts. You may perhaps realize, what I cannot altogether explain, the reason why I feel almost a stranger though at home."

(To Dr. R. R.)

"January 10, 19—.

"Could not get away, you conscientious old Medicus, because of the strange

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London Farmer's Advocate. Coupon No. 2.

accidents and holiday doings of the Whirlpool Colony at the Bluffs!

"Well, Well! I read your last with infinite amusement. You are in a fair way to have enlightenment borne in upon you without leaving your surgery, or at least travelling farther than your substantial gig will take you.

"Meanwhile I have had what should be a crushing blow to my vanity, and in analyzing it I've made an important discovery. One night last week I was sitting quietly in the card room at the Diddin Club, awaiting my whist mates (for here at least one may be reasonably sure of finding a group with bibliographic interests in common, and the pleasure of a non-commercial game of cards), when I heard a voice, one of a group outside, belonging to a wholesome, smooth-faced young fellow, with good tastes and instincts, say:—

"I don't know what happened to the old boy—when he took that unheard-of vacation of his last fall, or where he went, but one thing's very sure, since his return Cortright's grown pudgy and he's waked bang up. Wonder if he's finished that Colonial History, that's to be his monument, he's been working on all his life, or if he's fallen in love?"

"If he'd fall in love, he might stand more chance of finishing his history," replied a gray-haired friend in deep didactic tones: "he has material in plenty, but no vital stimulus for focusing his work."

"I gave an unpremeditated laugh that dwindled to a chuckle, as if it were produced by a choking process. Two heads appeared a second at the doorway of the room they had thought empty, and then vanished!

"When I came home I sat a long while before my deep fireplace thinking. They were right in two things, though not in the falling in love—that was done thirty-five years ago once and for all. I wondered if I had grown pudgy, dreadful word; stout carries a certain dignity, but pudgy suggests bunched, wabbling flesh. I've noticed my gloves go on lingeringly, clinging at the joints, but I read that to mean rheumatism!

"That night I stood before the mirror and studied my face as I unbuttoned my vest and loosened my shirt band at the neck. Suddenly I experienced great relief. For several months past I have felt a strange asphyxiation and a vertigo sensation when wearing formal clothes of any kind, enjoying complete comfort only in the loose neckcloth and wrapper of my private hours. I had thought of asking medical advice, but having acquired a distrust of general physic in my youth, and hoping you might come down, I put it off.

"Unfasten your own top button, and now prepare to laugh—Martin Cortright is not threatened with apoplexy or heart failure, he's grown pudgy, and his clothes are all too small! Yet but for that boy's good-tempered ridicule he might not have discovered it.

"Think of it, Richard! I, whom my mother considered interesting and of somewhat distinguished mien, owing to my pallor and slim nature! A pudgy worm belongs to chestnuts, not to books. A pudgy antiquarian is a thing unheard of since monastic days, when annal making was not deemed out of place if mingled with the rotund jollity of a Friar Tuck. You must bear half the blame, for it must be the butter habit that your Martha Corkle's fresh churned pats inoculated me with, for I always detested the stuff before.

"Graybeard's stricture, however, struck a deeper chord—He has material in plenty for his book, but no vital stimulus. This, too, is deeply true, and I have felt it vaguely so for some time, but no more realized it than I did my pudginess.

"No matter how much material one collects, if the vitalizing spirit is not there, no matter how realistically the stage may be set if the actors are mere dummies. The only use of the past is to illuminate and sustain the present.

"Your own home life and work, the honest questions of little Richard and Ian waken me from a long sleep, I believe, and set me thinking. What is a man remembered by the longest? Brain work, memorial building, or heart touching? Do you recollect once meeting old Moore—Clement Clark Moore—at my father's? He was a profound scholar