

ON WOMEN AS HOUSEKEEPERS

BY RALPH MILNE FARLEY

THOSE persons whose recollections carry back as far as the time of the adoption of the Nineteenth Amendment can remember the two slogans to the tune of which the campaign of votes-for-women was fought: the one, the cry of the suffragists, "Are women people?"; and the other, the reply of the antis, "Woman's place is in the home."

I am beginning to wonder if *either* side was right. Are women actually people—that is to say, the same sort of people that we men are? And is their place really in the home?

The average married woman is quite certain that she could run her husband's business better than he does, and I am not at all sure that she is wrong. But be that as it may. What I wish to assert is that the average man would make a much more competent housekeeper than his wife.

Housekeeping on a large scale, indeed, is always done by men, even now. Who ever heard of a woman hotel-manager, or a woman chef? Even all of the good modistes, couturiers and milliners are of the male sex. But when it comes to running the ordinary small home, a job that ought to take about two hours a day, the women-folk have us poor males perfectly bluffed.

They maintain their supremacy, not by the complicated ritual, the meaningless secret codes, and the general hocus-pocus that enchants the priests of the law, medicine, and the other male professions. No, women's ways are much more direct. The

very simplicity of their nomenclature disarms one. But they have such perverse ways of doing the easiest-sounding things, and they manage to make so difficult everything in which they seek male assistance, that we misguided men are full of sympathy over the way our wives have to slave while we enjoy life at the office.

If a factory or store were run along the inefficient lines of the average home, it would be bankrupt in a month. But let me give a few examples of feminine incapacity; listing them under the various traits which I believe to be the cause of woman's inherent unfitness for housekeeping.

II

First, women are unalterably conservative. I remember reading somewhere, in the writings of some famous person, an account of how he had shown some peasant women that the time-honored custom of carrying a stone in a sack on one shoulder, to balance a bag of grain on the other, was quite unnecessary. "Just put half the grain in each sack," said he, "and your load is cut in two." It seemed reasonable; so they tried it. But soon they reverted to the old method. "This is the regular way to carry grain," they explained—and that consideration outweighed all others.

Take the matter of dish-washing, the most time-consuming operation of all housework. As a boy, I worked on the New Hampshire farm of a man who ran his

own household. He had a wife, three children, a nursemaid, and the usual contingent of farmhands and boarders: about fifteen persons in all. Washing dishes for fifteen people is no joke.

So he rigged up two cubical sinks, about a yard each way. In one, he put boiling water, with a quarter of a teaspoon of kerosene to a gallon of water. In the other, he put just plain boiling water. The dishes were stacked in square wire-netting baskets on a long shelf. Above the shelf and the two sinks there ran a track like the one that carried feed and the manure out in the barn. A small rope with pulleys hung from this track. After dinner, he just hooked on the baskets, one by one, soured them up and down in one tank after the other, and then set them to drain and dry without wiping. The entire dish-washing was over in less than five minutes.

In every home in which I have lived since those boyhood days I have attempted to introduce that labor-saving system, but without success. The women wouldn't even give it a trial. "The kerosene would make the plates taste," said they. The plates never tasted on Talbot's farm, but a recital of that fact made no impression on the conservatism of these good ladies.

My mother—but that story comes under another heading.

My wife, although she wouldn't try the kerosene stunt, did install a rotary dish-washer, not because she saw anything wrong in the conventional process of washing in the sink, but rather because the salesman was a friend of my boss, who had sent him to our house.

The device certainly was a wonder. It was every bit as good as Talbot's, except that it lacked the unlimited capacity of his. But when we moved to a new house, it was not reinstalled. "It clutters up the sink," was the explanation, as though the

full capacity of the sink were needed when the dishes did not have to be washed therein. Also, "The kitchen doesn't look like a real kitchen with that contraption in it."

So an hour or two a day is wasted washing dishes in our present establishment. The dish-washing machine has been sold to a junk-man.

Secondly, women won't accept improvements. This, of course, is a phase of their conservatism. Putting dishes into a machine isn't really washing them. It gets them clean, yes; cleaner than washing would do; but it isn't "washing." Dividing the load isn't the regular way to carry grain to the mill.

The average man is an iconoclast. If a certain way of doing a thing is the time-tried conventional way, he will wrack his brains to try to improve on it. This is the spirit which has made America a nation of inventors, the center of the material progress of the world. How many women are among the patentees of the thousand or so patents which issue weekly in this country? I counted up in the most recent issue of the *Official Patent Gazette*, giving the ladies the benefit of the doubt on all names which might be either male or female. Out of 916 patentees, only 35, less than 4%, were women.

I came up against this contrast in temperaments at a very early age. As a small boy I made my own bed daily. The number of times that one has to walk around the end of a bed in making it, if laid end to end, would—well, it seemed to me that this expenditure of time was a great economic waste. So I sewed a row of metal eyelets along the foot of each of my sheets and blankets, and hooked them on to screw-hooks at the foot of the bed. One yank at the head-end of the outfit, and my bed was made. Furthermore, my bed-clothes never pulled out at the bottom.

Was I allowed to reap the fruits of my invention? Most certainly not! It was accused of being unsanitary. Whereupon I pointed out that my sheets got even more airing strung out taut from their anchorage than scrunpled together in a heap the way the ladies of the household did it. Well, anyhow, they asserted that it was not the right way to make a bed. This was their real reason. And I had to give in.

In recent years, I have developed a simple system for washing my few breakfast dishes while the family is away for the Summer. I keep a large laundry tub, full of water, in the middle of the kitchen floor. When I am through with a dish, I throw it in. When I need a dish, I fish it out and wipe it. Once or twice a week I change the water. But the ladies of my acquaintance, instead of being impressed by my ingenuity and originality, are horrified.

Once I served on a committee for a series of dances. In previous years there had been complaints about the fruit-punch, woman-made out of the best materials. So this year I made the punch. To eight gallons of water, I added one quart of cheap claret, and glucose, citric acid and saccharine to taste; also, for the sake of realism, one orange, one lemon and one banana, all sliced and floating. The whole eight gallons cost less than \$2. I kept the formula to myself, and the punch made a hit.

As one lady said to me, "It is such a relief to get genuine fruit-punch again, after that awful chemical substitute which last year's committee served us."

I did not disillusion her. It was masculine ingenuity against feminine intuition.

Some women are as ingenious as men, it is true. But the moment the cause for the ingenuity passes, they revert to the old ways, with much the same calm intelligence as is displayed by rescued horses rushing back into a burning stable.

Take, for example, one of my aunts. She had planned cornstarch pudding for a certain meal, and found that she was all out of cornstarch. There were plenty of other desserts in the house, but this particular meal called for cornstarch. Just why, I know not. But that was an example of her feminine persistence. So, in desperation, she used laundry starch. She admitted to me that it worked even better than cornstarch. All the guests, not knowing that she had employed a substitute, praised the smoothness of the pudding. But my aunt took great pains never to be out of cornstarch again.

Did you ever see a woman who knew how to operate a can-opener? I never did. They attack a can with all the abandon of a tabby-cat pouncing on a hop-toad, or a cow getting over a fence. Frequently they cut their fingers. Also the contents of the can get hopelessly mangled by being extracted through a too small and too jagged hole.

Several varieties of new patent can-openers are now on the market. These will open a can more speedily, more neatly, and with less danger than the old sort. As they are still for sale, someone must buy them. Who does? Probably the bachelors. There is not a married household of my acquaintance which possesses one.

In fact, I have even known women to scorn the simple key that comes with certain brands of coffee and sardines, and try to use an ordinary can-opener on them instead. To my remonstrances these good ladies reply, "But, my dear, these contraptions aren't can-openers."

You see, women won't accept substitutes, even though the substitutes constitute an improvement.

Thirdly, women aren't mechanical. Probably this trait contributes to their disinclination to adopt the new can-openers. For

such contrivances are machinery, and women are horribly afraid of machinery.

When I was in college, every lunchroom on Harvard Square had a set of little clock-work timers for boiling eggs. The moment that any regular patron entered, Butler Walker or Jimmy or Rammy, as the case might be, would glance at a chart which listed the exact fraction of a second to which that patron liked his eggs done. Then Butler, or etc., would set a dial, insert the egg, and out again would pop the egg at just the right instant.

These gadgets are simple, inexpensive, and fool-proof. But can you get a woman to use one? Not on your life! For that isn't the regular way to cook an egg, my dear; and, besides, the gadgets are machinery. We have one, but I can't get my wife to use it.

The conventional practice with respect to boiling eggs is to put in the requisite number at haphazard intervals, open them one by one at the table, and let each person pick out the one which most nearly approaches his or her idea as to the proper degree of coagulation. Like the way they used to issue uniforms in the Army, this suits the first two or three patrons to a T, but it isn't fair at all to the last person served. I prefer the gadgets of my old college days.

A neighbor lady recently furnished a fine example of woman's mechanical ineptitude. Glancing across from my yard, I noticed that she would sit motionless for some time on a lawn-chair, holding some small object in her hands. Then she would let go of it, stoop over and pick it up again, and repeat the process.

Much mystified, I ambled over to see what it was all about. I found that she had a small silver picture-frame, which she was holding together. But the silver part was slightly sprung, so that when she let go of

it, it would fly away from the back. She kept holding it together for a longer and longer period each time, but each time it would spring apart as soon as she released it.

I stood and watched her for quite a while, which I suppose was mean of me. At last she sighed with exasperation, and remarked that I irritated her. Whereupon I asked if I might try. I took the frame, bent it slightly until it was perfectly flat, put it together, and handed it back to her, all fixed. I claim no particular credit for the performance; any man could have done it equally well, and with as little fuss and feathers.

My wife says that the trouble with the neighbor woman wasn't lack of mechanical ability, but rather the possession of a rare degree of persistence. She was determined to beat that picture frame in her own way, if it took all Summer.

Fourthly, women won't follow directions. As I started to state, a while back, my mother was broadminded enough to try the kerosene cure for dirty dishes, although she was sure that it would cause the dishes to taste of oil. But when I told her to put in only one-quarter of a teaspoon of kerosene to a gallon of water, she snorted, "How perfectly absurd!" and proceeded to put in a cupful. Of course, this made the dishes taste frightfully, thus vindicating her prophecy.

I know another woman, whom I once induced to try a certain coffee-substitute. The directions on the can stated that it was not to be brewed like coffee; but that, if cooked in a certain specified way, the resulting beverage was guaranteed to be indistinguishable from real coffee.

"How absurd!" asserted the lady. "If it's any good as a coffee substitute it'll have to stand or fall by being cooked just like coffee."

So she brewed it in a coffee-pot in the regular way, and the result was awful. Which, of course, vindicated her prejudice against substitutes.

Once I got the old lady where I was boarding to help me make some candied ginger-root, an article of which I am very fond, but which was too expensive for my then pocket-book. So I was overjoyed to find in some woman's magazine—of all places!—a recipe for making this condiment out of carrots, powdered ginger and sugar.

The recipe was very explicit in demanding that the carrots must be only very slightly parboiled.

"How absurd!" exclaimed my landlady. "That's no kind of way to cook carrots!"

So the carrots were *properly* cooked, and I got neither buttered carrots nor candied ginger-root out of the resulting mess.

Women, to whom I have told this carrot-episode, all agree that it proves that I ought to have realized that you can't make candied ginger-root out of carrots. For that would be a substitute, you see; and the rules of the game do not permit substitution.

III

I have here given the high spots of a long life of observing the feminine sex wrestling with the difficulties of housework. And because women are conservative, will not accept improvements, fear machinery, are pig-headed, and won't follow directions, I am firmly of the conviction that, by and large, they will never make a success of their calling.

The average man could accomplish in two or three hours the daily housework done by the average woman in eight or

ten; provided, of course, that he were given full control and free rein, and permitted to reorganize the household-plant upon an efficient basis.

On the other hand, the average woman, if permitted to take over her husband's business, could undoubtedly cut out a large part of the unnecessary conferences, blank forms, reports, and carbon copies; and produce more results with less overhead.

Why not, then, swap places?

I'll tell you why. Just about the time that each of them got things going smoothly—the wife making more money, and the husband running the home like clockwork on two hours a day, and spending the rest of his time fishing or playing golf or poker—just about then the wife would catch on, conclude that her husband was a lazy loafer, and make him come down to the office and work *under her* for his six free hours a day. Then what would become of his hard-earned independence?

P. S. I read the foregoing to my wife. Her only comment was, "Are you trying to be horrid?"

A few minutes later she flounced back into my study with a look of triumph in her eye, and bearing a tumbler containing the dregs of some switchel which I had been drinking.

"I found this on the newel-post in the front hall," said she, "and it has left a white ring where you put it down wet. How would you prevent that sort of thing happening on your two hours a day?"

"Very simply," I replied, not in the least nonplussed. "I should put deck-varnish on the stair-rail."

Whereupon she floored me with the, to her, unanswerable argument, "But deck-varnish isn't the proper finish, my dear, to use in houses!"

THE ARTS AND SCIENCES

Architecture

THE HORIZONTAL CHALLENGES THE VERTICAL

BY WILLIAM E. WILLNER

IN THE decade just before the arrival of the steel building, Providence saw fit to send the sons of many American families to study architecture in Paris. At the École des Beaux Arts they were introduced to the French idea that good architecture could be produced by strictly logical methods, that Plato's association of the good, the true, and the beautiful was a practical recipe for good design. The first essential in designing a building was to eliminate preconceived notions and allow the requirements of the programme to dictate the plan. The façade should then tell the truth about the plan and section, the details should suggest the character of occupancy and the special methods of construction.

The whole emphasis of the Beaux Arts system was on the study of planning, which enabled the student to develop a fine sense of proportion without being too much influenced by the personal tastes of his patron. The elevations were usually slighted, and any façade would pass muster if it resulted logically from the plan. The Americans, however, were usually more interested in results than in methods. Though they marveled at the triumphs of abstract design which the patient French students produced in their floor plans, they gave most of their admiration to the hastily drawn façades. They were after the "big things" in architecture, the rules which would enable them to design handsome

buildings with speed and efficiency. The philosophy of design enunciated by M. Julien Guadet might be all very well, but the practical man would realize that all plans could be reduced to one of five or six approved forms, that all façades should consist of one, three, or five motifs, and that one part of the façade must always be unmistakably more important than all the rest.

When the young diplômé returned to America, he was faced with the new problem of the tall office building. It was a problem unlike any of those which had been so neatly solved in the ateliers of Paris, and it seemed, for a while, that it could not be analyzed in terms of Beaux Arts philosophy. Twenty stories, all of the same height and importance, could not be truthfully expressed if they were to yield a composition of orthodox form. Either the cult of truth or the cult of the dominant feature had to give way, and it was truth that yielded. The practical way to deal with the twenty stories was to divide them arbitrarily into three parts, using the first four stories as a base, decorated with a Doric order, leaving the next twelve stories as a plain shaft, and treating the upper four stories as a capital, decorated with a Corinthian order. For many years this was accepted as the proper way to design an office building. Beaux Arts logic went no farther, but was content to impose its standardized composition on almost every American city and to play the dilettante by decorating that single type with every style of architecture about which a book had