

A Century of Progress

II.—What the Century Has Done for the Household¹

By Candace Wheeler

THE first point of comparison between the comfort of the household a hundred years ago and at present is in its shelter. Looking back to the houses of that day, we find three prevailing types, with their variations. These were the log house, the Dutch farm-house, and what is now known as the Colonial house. Of course this refers only to houses in America, and not to Old World domiciles, where family living has been an unbroken and constant process of adding link after link to the chain which has existed since Eve began housekeeping in Eden.

The log cabin was an evolution of the wigwam, the first imperfect utterance of the wilderness when the pioneer American attempted to teach it the word Home; and, rude and sylvan as it was, it secured warmth and safety to the family, and fostered many of the best characteristics of the race.

I remember a pretty story told me by the son of a man who felled trees and built a cabin in the forests of the Catskills as they existed less than a hundred years ago. The trees were cut in the late autumn or early winter, while the blood in their trunks was frozen, and the torpor of the season was upon them. But when they were laid together and crossed into the parallelogram of the cabin, and a great stone chimney at one end became the roaring tunnel for the household fire, the mutilated trees awoke from their trance, and, as the melted sap began to circulate in their veins, young shoots and tender leaves broke out and grew into long twigs at the end nearest the fire. Their backs were frozen, but their hearts were warm, and responded, in their beautiful vegetable kind, to the home life and the home fire. The man who told me this story lives still upon the same farm, but the log cabin has been changed into a villalike house, the usual home of the prosperous farmer.

Of course this is a natural consequence of changed conditions and continuous industry. The duration of the log cabin in the history of the country was governed by the duration

of the forests. When the wilderness ceased to be, the log house went out of existence. There was no such reason, however, for the extinguishment of the Dutch farm-house, which was as ideal a model for the farm as the Colonial house is for the estate. Nothing is more picturesque, set in the midst of fertile acres, than one of these old farm-houses, which one may still see on the west bank of the Hudson, built mainly of warmly colored stone, with shingled gables filled with fan-shaped windows, and a roof hipped at the top, and sliding like a curled lip into a short projecting curve over the front door.

There was something indescribably graceful in this elongated roof, unsupported by pillars; as if the house of itself reached out to give protecting shadow for the leisure of the family, and shelter to its friends. But, graceful as it was, it has left no trace in the architecture of our present race of farm-houses.

The true Dutch farm-house seldom rose to the height of two full stories, but there is one such specimen still standing along the track of the Long Island Railroad where it leaves the salt meadows that border Gowanus Creek—a specimen which gives one the sensation of witnessing a dishonored old age. It stands upon a knoll overlooking the salt meadows, and the overlapping of the blue tide, and the wonderful shades of green and brown in the salt grass; but all that was once most beautiful in its view has grown to be a dirty fringe of a foul suburb. Now it swarms with a cheap tenantry, although it was once the country house of De Witt Clinton; and it still keeps enough of its former dignity and beauty to set one's thoughts reconstructing its dignified past.

The Dutch farm-house owed its undeservedly transient existence in America to the Dutch trader, or to the well-to-do immigrant who settled along the tributary creeks of the Hudson, or on the level, natural meadows of Long Island. His selection of acres effected he straightway brought over in Dutch ship-bottoms brick and hewn stone, and masons to lay them, and small-paned window-sashes, and carpenters to place them—men who knew how

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to hew long beams of wood and lap them into curves for the curled porches, under which the householder intended to sit and smokingly survey his fertile dominion, contented to grow rich at the pores instead of by unpalatable activity.

But of the prevailing fashions of houses of a hundred years ago, the only one which has really bequeathed itself to the generations is that which we have proudly and fondly christened Colonial. We may see specimens of these beautiful old houses all along the prosperous shore towns of New England, through Maryland, Virginia, and as far south as the Carolinas; their erection having generally depended upon the importance or the rapidly increasing commerce of the different sections of country. In Massachusetts and other New England States they were first built by political dignitaries, Governors and the like, and afterward by great ship-owners and traders with China.

In Maryland, Virginia, and the Southern States they were built by estate-owners, who raised and shipped tobacco in their own vessels for an English market; and here came in at least one of those often untold reasons for the difference in material and style of the Northern and Southern Colonial house. Both were, in truth, modeled upon a then prevailing style of architecture in England; a style which had been shaped by Inigo Jones and Sir Christopher Wren, and was characterized by a dignified elegance which, when applied to New England homes constructed of wood, took on a kind of classic slenderness which greatly intensified its finer qualities.

Southern houses, on the other hand, were constructed of brick and hewn stone, brought back in the vessels which carried tobacco to England. The stone was often hewn into the very shapes of cornice and capital and pillar, and, when set up on this new soil, made what was truly an English house, although somewhat modified to meet the exigencies of a different domestic service.

A hundred years of onward march in domestic architecture has not materially changed the exterior of the characteristic Colonial house; indeed, in the late revival of that style we find that the test of excellence is the fidelity with which the ancient lines have been followed—and this in spite of the development of the "American country house," which has gathered to itself and appropriated nearly all the features of all the ages of architecture. Naturally we have a right to this

inheritance, since we are "the heirs of all the ages" in architecture; yet the genius which created a style so lasting and popular should have its reward of acknowledgment.

Next to the domestic conditions of shelter come those of light and warmth, and here we find that a hundred years has invented or discovered an absolutely new world. At that time fire, in the form of living coals, was as carefully preserved and tended as the sacred flame in Eastern temples. It was the last and most binding duty of the householder, when the day was over, to *bury the fire*; and the first necessity of the early morning was to search the gray ashes for living coals which might be coaxed into demonstration by pine shavings or tips of resinous fir boughs. Failing that, the next resource was an early journey to the nearest neighbor—perhaps a half-mile away—to ask "the loan of a shovelful of coals," which were transported in a perforated pail.

"No matches?" exclaims some young, or perhaps even middle-aged, person. No! no matches until about the year 1825, when the "Lucifer match" came into existence, and proceeded to make of itself a household flame and an indispensable necessity.

"But what did people do before that?" asks the aforementioned ignorant modern.

They had tin boxes of tinder, with a little compartment for a flint and a bit of steel; and to "strike a light" was a simple description of a veritable process.

A spark from steel and flint falling upon tinder could be tended and fostered into a blaze when other means failed.

The first matches were not simple affairs which a child might manipulate. There were a bottle of phosphorus and a bundle of small sticks, the latter saturated with some chemical preparation which took occasion to flame out if brought into contact with the phosphorus. This performance was at first an absorbing "chemical experiment" practiced only semi-occasionally by careful heads of families for the benefit of the children who were taking their course of chemistry at school.

It is a long step from that to the "turning on" of the electric light by the present householder, as he lies in bed at night, and by that simple motion suddenly illuminating his many suites of rooms; or the turning on and off of a grand sufficiency of warmth by the movement of a hand. And think of all that has come between, since the pioneer and his children sat in the blaze of the open fire,

heaping on boughs of dry wood to make a light by which the page of the book or newspaper could be illuminated!

There were candles, of course—tallow candles dipped at home in the simpler houses, or made of pressed wax and burned in candelabra in the notable ones; and there were also lamps in the great houses, astral and argand lamps, burning whale-oil, a precious commodity, the quest of which kept hundreds of men wandering all their years over the great waters, in daily peril and continued discomfort; a quest that enriched but few, although it well-nigh destroyed one of the great animal races—one of the greatest creatures of the Lord. The household required light, and men hazarded life and squandered years to furnish it; and after all was done, one day some one noted a scum of iridescence upon the pools of a swamp, and, lo! kerosene had trickled into the world. Now it travels its thousands of miles in special pipes and empties itself into barrels, and wanders the world over in ships, illuminating roads and cars and vessels and houses of all grades and sizes.

It burns alike for rich and poor, one of those precious commodities almost as free to the world as air and water; a shared blessing from the very heart of Mother Earth.

Gas has never been, and probably never will be, a poor man's light. Neither will electricity, unless the future holds some method of producing and utilizing it more open than at present to general use; but kerosene shines for the many, and against the graceful astral lamp of sixty or seventy years ago, a veritable "chiny bowl, chock full of moonlight," or the complicated French mechanical lamp by which our well-bred grandmothers could see to play upon their harps and spinets, or embroider satin cushions and muslin ruffles, we may safely put in rivalry the pervading Rochester lamp, whether in tin, porcelain, or precious bronze, with its blazing head-light of spreading radiance—in the shine of which the housewife can thread her needle and patch the children's clothes as well by night as by day, and the fine lady, veiling its brilliancy by falls of colored tulle and silk, read the latest society novel or write reports of her best charity.

Although light was an expensive luxury in the houses of our predecessors, there was no lack of warmth in those of either rich or poor. While there were coals of fire for the altar of the fireplace, there was certain to be wood for the sacrifice. Trees and trees and trees,

both living and dead, everywhere. The kings of the forests were not then overthrown, and their tribes were still standing in uncounted millions, and, all unknowing of the coming doom, lifting their crowned heads to sing with the winds in summer and wailing at their bitter blasts in winter. Singly, but in successive thousands, they were devoured by that two-faced element of fire which is both a god in beneficence and a demon in destructiveness.

But although warmth was not in any wise unattainable in the houses of a hundred years ago, it was at the penalty of much labor and effort. Even the comparatively small task of feeding the fires in the great fireplaces which were necessary in houses both great and small would in this day of domestic ease be considered herculean. I know one low house, still standing as it has stood for two hundred and thirty years, in what was then the pleasant and secluded village, and is now the pleasant suburban town, of Flushing, where, with unusual thought and consideration for the labor of "bringing in wood"—that already old-time phrase—two opposite doors had been planned in the kitchen, through which every day a horse was led, hauling, as he came, a great log, which was unhitched and rolled upon the fire, the horse passing out at the opposite door.

It was a wonder that the women who ministered as cooks before those great altars were not often devoured by the flames.

There were wide hearths, to be sure, where coals could be drawn out and pots kept gently simmering, away from the fierceness of the blaze; and there were Dutch ovens—half-cylinders of sheet-iron or tin which could be set in front of the fire, and in which meat could be roasted with a wonderful completeness and perfection. There were also the brick or stone ovens, which may still occasionally be seen, bulging out like great bubbles of stone and mortar beside the chimneys, a veritable cave of plenty to a devouring family.

I well remember one house, where within fifty years such an oven opened its mouth once a week and uttered words which were culinary gems. There were five daughters and a mother in this house, and men to feed, as the family phrase went; and Saturday was baking-day, and at ten o'clock the oven-cave was opened and filled with brush and light wood, which was kept burning an even hour. Then it was allowed to die down, and the

coal and ashes withdrawn by use of a long-handled shovel. Then were spread upon the heated floor of the oven, and in nearer or more remote proximity to the heated sides, loaves of bread and cake and pans of pies—innumerable in quantity—and puddings of Indian meal, and jars of apples and pears, sealed with dough, and what not of good things which even now it joys me to remember.

But the Dutch oven and the brick oven and the ten-foot fireplace have had their day. So wise a man as Benjamin Franklin, noting the wastefulness of fuel in the latter, put his mind upon it—as he did upon most things which he observed—and the result was the “Franklin stoves,” which forthwith were set in many of the great fireplaces in the parlors of Colonial houses. Then Count Rumford took up the problem, and constructed the cooking-stove—the stove with an oven; and for the first time since savage man learned that food was better when it had been subjected to fire, cooking could be conducted without the cook being roasted as well as the meat.

The changes in the methods of production of light and warmth, and preparation of food in the house, are more noticeable, perhaps, than in the matter of furnishing. Our ways of procuring our furniture are different, it is true, but as to the final result—the furniture itself—we cannot say that we have made great progress.

The chair and table and armoire of a hundred years ago are still—like the Colonial house—models of elegance in form and durability of construction. And as we refer the style of the house to the days and influence of two great architects, we must refer the fineness of the furniture to two great designers, Chippendale and Sheraton. Undoubtedly there were others, although their names have not come down to us connected with their work. But to account for the general excellence of the furniture in use a hundred years ago, we may be sure that a group of artists contributed to it, each working out some special beauty or excellence which was consolidated with the whole, making it what it was.

A hundred years from now probably all of the good stained glass of present production will be referred to Tiffany or La Farge, and yet scores of artists are combining to lift this shining example of the most progressive form of art of to-day to its pedestal

The furniture of a hundred years and more ago, which collectors have been for the last ten years bringing together with joy and rejoicing, was the result of the English Renaissance.

In our Southern States, from which such stores of beautiful furniture have been brought within the last few years, the houses were furnished directly from England, the furniture being brought, as the material for the houses was brought, in returning tobacco-ships. It has far more variety of shape and style than the Northern Colonial furniture, because, in the latter case, the maker was imported instead of the furniture, bringing in his own compact bulk the industrial skill, the knowledge, and the “patterns” with which to furnish all the houses of New England. He brought the patterns, but not the capacity for design, and consequently one Colonial piece of New England furniture is exactly like another.

The cabinet-maker of that day did not often work in a shop. While the house which he was to furnish was being completed in careful and unhurried fashion, the cabinet-maker was an inmate, measuring and constructing his furniture to fit the spaces and the rooms.

In the low house in Flushing, where the logs were horse-hauled to the kitchen fire, it is a matter of family history that the cabinet-maker abode for two entire years, building the double-decked bureaus which could not now be taken out of the doors without being sawn asunder, and turning and carving the high-post bedsteads, and shaping the beautiful old chairs which still adorn the house and are still strong and serviceable. This furniture, like all the best of the old furniture, was solid mahogany. No thin veneer spread over the surface of a softer wood went into its construction. It was cut from the log in the shape which was required.

But, although mahogany was the favorite wood for cabinetry, some of the old pieces are made of the wild cherry which abounded in our forests, and still springs up everywhere along the fence-lines or in corners which the plow cannot reach. I sometimes think the ground must be full of love for certain varieties of vegetation, since it produces them on any and every occasion. The wild cherry is an old love of our Northern soil, and truly it is a virtuous wood, full of a fine warmth of color, and pleasant odor, and of a reasonable firmness.

There was another native wood which the

cabinet-makers of a hundred years ago held in great estimation, and which is seldom seen in these days. The curled maple was even more beautiful than mahogany in its markings and the wonderful motion of its growth. Roll after roll of satiny rings of tree-fiber make up its substance, as if the tree had grown and kept time to the sound of rolling waves upon a sea beach, or to some other rhythmical motion of nature.

The cabinet-work of to-day is made in far other than the deliberate fashion of our forebears; a machine instead of a man is set to make it; and a machine is generally in a hurry, trying to make up for lost time—for all the years when it was not. But we must acknowledge that since men with the education of artists have undertaken to teach and train workers, there is little fault to find with the results.

In truth, it is not in beauty of exterior or perfection of furniture that the homes of to-day differ so greatly from those of a hundred years ago; for the amount of luxury which was possible in those old days was not so much less than the luxury of to-day.

The most pampered human being of the present would find no diminution of bodily ease in lying in lavendered homespun upon one of our aristocratic foremother's beds of down, in the high-ceilinged room of a Colonial house lit by wax candles in tall silver candlesticks, and warmed by the spreading and resinous blaze of oak and cedar.

It is not in the *degree* but in the *sum* of human luxury that we are impressed with the change. It is in the spread of it. Ease and convenience have lapped their gracious influences over all the former hardships of the industrious poor, and what were once the possibilities of the rich have become the necessities of all.

The sure reward of moderate industry at this period of the world is a house which will exclude the weather, heat well diffused by mechanical inventions, an abundance or a superabundance of artificial light, furniture which is at least fine to look at, carpets, books, clothing which is comfortable and becoming; in short, all and even more than was the ordinary portion of the wealthiest citizen of a hundred years ago.

And this is what the centuries are doing—at least it is what the centuries in America are doing: lifting up the poor in the scale of material living. All of the wonderful outreachings of human intellect which we

call inventions are to be finally measured, not by the wonder of their existence, but by the proportion in which they equalize the possibilities of happiness, or the ease which they give to that mighty strain of endurance which we call life.

But if the century which is nearly at its close has given so largely to the ease and comfort of the laboring mass, it has also introduced into the homes of the rich an element which was in truth somewhat lacking in those days of bare and slender elegance.

All that we broadly cover by the two words "decorative treatment" was unknown in the interior of even the most luxurious of the stately Colonial houses. Color as a science and an art was an unstudied quantity in those days. There were no stained and jeweled windows to intensify and diffuse the morning and evening light, no inspirations of graduated color spread over walls and floors and ceiling. The "beauty bath" of the modern interior was a thing of the future.

How much quickening of the mental and spiritual life of man may result from the warmth and glow of this color envelopment it is still too early to determine. It may well be that tropical blossoms of humanity, wonderful instances of creative possibility, may be stimulated into growth by such surroundings, or it may serve only to modify the flatness of life which results from too much ease, and to provide a region of enjoyment disconnected from things that wear and fret the mind. Whatever may be its influence upon the character, this adoption of beauty as one of the privileges of the "privileged classes" seems to emphasize the fact that the equalization of comfort which has been the work of the century is so complete that mere wealth must invent new uses to prove its value.



Labor is one of the great elements of society—the great substantial interest on which we all stand. Not feudal service, or predial toil, or the irksome drudgery by one race of mankind subjected to another; but labor, intelligent, manly, independent, thinking and acting for itself, earning its own wages, accumulating those wages into capital, educating childhood, maintaining worship, claiming the right of elective franchise, and helping to uphold the great fabric of the State. That is American labor; and all my sympathies are with it, and my voice, till I am dumb, will be for it.—*Daniel Webster*.

Reclaiming the Adirondacks

By Ernest Carter

Much ground may be covered on a hobby by starting in the right direction and riding with a stiff rein.

FOR the purpose of somewhat defining the circle to whose sympathies this article is addressed, the writer must, in face of the danger of an anticlimax, indulge at the outset in a descriptive definition of his own particular hobby. It was, and still is, so far as memory and spirit can go, to camp in a spruce-bark "lean-to" on the edge of a wild-land lake in the heart of an American forest, removed from every sight and sound of civilization, where the trout are sufficiently plentiful to yield a modest breakfast or supper any day, and where the deer, if not very numerous, are still so much at home that one may see them occasionally along the shores of the lake in the daytime, and shoot one now and then without the fear of its being the only one within ten miles.

All this was much more easy to accomplish in the Adirondacks—that great tank made to catch and hold rain-water for the Hudson—fifteen years ago than now. Since then the iniquitous¹ Adirondack and St. Lawrence Railroad has, as confessed in its own advertisements, stabbed that beautiful tract through the heart; much ruthless lumbering has been done; many a forest fire has been allowed to run days and weeks with no effort made to extinguish it; many a screaming steamer has been put on virgin waters; and, owing to the increased facilities of transportation, many of the woodland resorts have lost their sense of reality as such, and have grown to the dimensions and common publicity of Saratoga hotels. Saratoga hotels have the justification of being adapted to their environment when in Saratoga, but to a true lover of the woods they are as unbecoming to an Adirondack lake as a "camp" where a butler in dress-suit answers the electric bell at the front door—an anomaly which, by the way, may be seen near Paul Smith's. Many an old camper,

after trying in vain for several seasons to revive the thrill of the old days, finally cries, "Ichabod!" and with a heavy heart decides that "next year," time and money allowing, he will go to Maine, Canada, or the great Northwest, where there is still hope of getting beyond the reach of a steam-whistle. This is founded on the universal aversion to an anticlimax in the pursuit of pleasure, and may serve for those of this and perhaps the next generation who have the means and time to chase that fickle goddess the length and breadth of a continent; but what are hunters and fishers of a hundred years hence to do?

In this desertion of a tract as used up, so far as our purposes are concerned, and the seeking and despoliation of new fields by shooting off the game and fishing out the fish, are we not doing the very thing for which we blame railroad, lumber, and hotel magnates—namely, like a swarm of potato-bugs, eating the profit of to-day out of one new pasture after another, without thought of the future good of the country and those who are to follow us? Is it not possible, even now, to redeem and restore what we already have at our back door, so to speak, in our own beloved State? and is there not a patriotic duty involved in such an effort that would justify the expenditure of money, thought, and time in this direction? We are apt to ask, "Why does not the State, the people, wake up, before it is too late, to the realization of what it is allowing, little by little, to slip through its fingers?" Is there, however, nothing that we, as private citizens, can do in the meantime to stay the spoliation of this God-given recreation ground, sanitarium, and water source? That some little has recently been done by the State along this line should not cause us to relax our efforts, but rather to take hold with the new grip that hope gives. We must remember that moneyed interests, such as lumber, railroad, and hotel, never sleep or relax hope and effort so long as there remains wealth to be exploited, and that the people as a whole do not yet fully realize the importance of guarding the sources of the Hudson, or reserving a place where the youth of every generation may cultivate the sturdy virtues that are developed by a real woodsman's life—simplicity, patience, self-reliance, invention,

¹ The iniquity of this road is not to be laid at the door of its promoters and owners so much, perhaps, as at the door of public sentiment, as expressed by legislative action, allowing a line which practically parallels the Delaware and Hudson Canal Company's Railroad on the east, and the Rome, Watertown, and Ogdensburg Railroad on the west, to split a God-given natural park in two by a singeing line of railroad sparks, noise, and small stations, which serve as ganglia or nuclei for further encroachments.