

'A Servantless House.

(By E. S. VALENTINE.)

(Published by Special Arrangement.)

To a mere man it is always an inscrutable mystery that woman—housekeeping woman—should so resolutely set her face against labour-saving devices. Of course, there are exceptions to the rule, and in the long run intelligence and convenience carry the day, but it nevertheless remains true that all household innovations, from the humble and necessary clothes-mangle and spring curtain-roller to the electric lamp and the electric lift, long found in women their most uncompromising opponents. An observer, employing only surface logic, would have said that the sewing-machine and the carpet-sweeper would be welcomed by the ladies of England with open arms. Read the memoirs of the time, and you will find that Howe's invention had literally to fight its way to female favour long after it had been approved and adopted by the other and perhaps more impulsive sex.

Barring some slight improvements, few of which go down to the bed-rock of the house-keeping problem, I am inclined to agree with the man who said that every household in Great Britain is "run on mediæval lines." When the daring fifteenth century male innovator moved the fireplace from the middle of the floor and set it beneath a brick chimney, he was doubtless stoutly opposed by his good wife, and the spirit the dame exhibited is shown clearly to-day in the treatment her twenty million descendants accord the four thousand eight hundred and twenty-three servant-saving devices registered at our Patent Office. Of course there is a reason for all this, and the reason is that, notwithstanding the enterprise and volatility of the spinster half, the married housekeeper—bless her heart! is the very incarnation of conservatism and laughs scornfully at her lord's suggestions for a short cut out of her difficulties.

"My dear Charles," she says, with pity for his ignorance, "you don't understand servants. They never would put up with any such new-fangled nonsense. If we were to run a house on the lines you suggest they would leave us."

"That's exactly it," retorts the Mere Man. "Let them leave us. Do you know that there are four thousand eight hundred and twenty-three household labour-saving devices registered at the Patent Office? Have many of these have you adopted? A paltry hundred or two."

"Well as you seem to know all about household management, perhaps you'll have the kindness to tell me how you would run the house."

"I'd try science. If machinery can plough our fields and reap our harvests, run our ships and carriages, write our letters, print our newspapers, fan us when we are too hot and warm us when we are too cold—it surely ought to be able to help a woman over her housework. Only woman doesn't give science a chance. Why, when science invented the umbrella she let Jonas Hanway carry it about alone for years, and only laughed at him for his pains."

"Fudge! How can science answer the front-door bell, wait at table, make beds, dust the rooms, sweep—"

The Mere Man interposed.

There is the vacuum cleaner. Why isn't that used in every home?"

The lady of the house drummed impatiently on the table with her fingers. "Vacuum cleaners are so expensive. As to the other things, if they are really any good," she said, "why doesn't everybody have them?"

"There you are again!" retorted the Mere Man. "Why didn't everybody use electric light until twenty years after it was available? Have you not read how shocked and incredulous London was when Lady Randolph Churchill first lit up her Mayfair house with electricity? Now, I was going to say that if I were running this house I shouldn't have my beds made by servants when I could avail myself of the ingenious bed-making machine invented many years ago by a barrister named Simmonds."

"What can a barrister know of bed-making? A bed-making machine, indeed!"

"Nevertheless, my dear, it worked like a charm. You see, it was so simple. You pressed a spring and one rod raised the counterpane and drew it out taut, another lifted the blankets, while two others at top and bottom drew off the top and bottom sheets and held them fast and erect to air. It was all done in a moment, and when you wanted the bed made up, down came the slender frames and all was in its place again, silently and as neat as you please."

A keen satirical look appeared in the lady's eye.

"Really! And how about the mattress? Was that not made up too? But



The table disappears for an instant; but why should the conversation flag?

"By no means. Personally, I prefer stairs. The stairs would be swept daily by the simplest contrivance in the world. In a groove of the bannisters runs a rod supporting a spiral brush, revolving not unlike an electric fan. Pausing on the top step, I touch a spring which closes a gate to the stairway. At the bottom I negotiate another, and the stair-brush

The master of the house cast his eye around the dining-room.

"Anything more?"

"Oh, dear, yes. I have hardly begun. You've no idea of the many household contrivances we husbands have invented. Take window-cleaning, for example."

"Oh, I'm glad you thought of that. The housewife forced a smile.

"What can be more antiquated and inconvenient, and, I may add, dangerous, than your present window-cleaning arrangements? Now I should have every window-sash in the house fitted with two sets of panes, easily adjustable. Once a week a man would come round to change the sashes, while the dirty panes would be taken away and cleaned."

The lady interrupted.

"Perhaps, now that you've abolished servants upstairs, you will kindly tell us poor women how you propose to annihilate them in the kitchen, dining-room, and drawing-room. Even supposing your meals to be sent in from the pastrycook's—"

"From the Dinner Supply Company," interpolated the Mere Man.

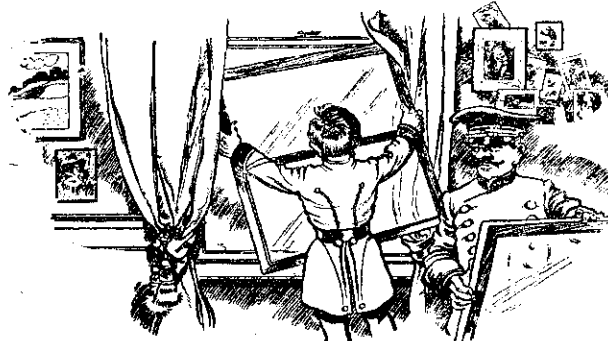
"You must have a servant or two to wait at table."

"Why?"

"Good gracious, Charles! You don't mean to say—"

He took her hand and led her into the drawing-room. When they were seated, he drew forth a pencil and notebook.

There are twenty different automatic table-waiters—at least, table-changers, he said, "besides other devices. But the simplest plan of all of changing courses is to have the fresh course come up from the kitchen direct. The guests are seated at table, we will say. All are finished with a course. At a given signal the table descends through a trap in the carpeted floor, which instantly closes again. In the meantime another



Window-cleaning in the future. Clean sashes arriving and being instantly fitted to windows by the "Metropolitan Clean-Window Company."

I suppose your clever barrister never thought of lifting and shaking and smoothing a mattress—not to mention such things as pillows!"

"It was unnecessary. The mattress was pneumatic—as soft or as hard as you like. A small wheel at the foot of the bed was released by a touch, and inflation or deflation was done almost automatically."

The Mere Man gazed at his wife indulgently.

"So now," he continued, "having got your rooms dusted and your beds made, we will descend below stairs."

The lady gave a cry.

"Oh, then there are stairs! And that being the case, I suppose they will need sweeping occasionally. Or is that unnecessary!"

automatically descends. Not a particle of dust escapes, but all is gathered into a receive— on the last stair the brush strikes a trapway and the heap of dust is shot into an external bin. It is really all so simple. Alphonse de Rothschild tried it and found it admirable."

"Ah! Rothschild—I thought so. These contrivances are for very rich people. We could not afford them."



All dishes and appointments go regularly to the municipal cleaners and washers.

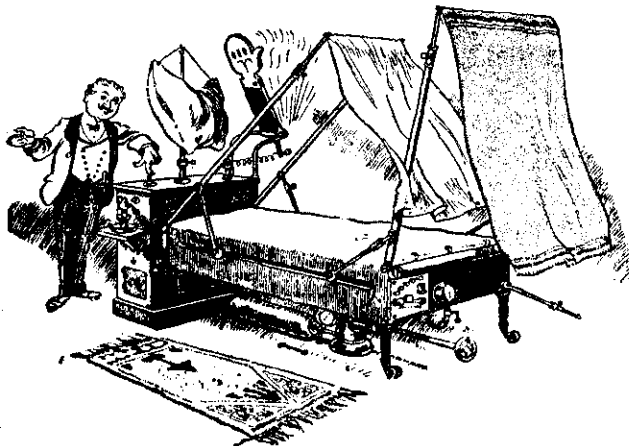
"My dear girl," pursued the Mere Man, "have you pondered on the cost of the first sewing-machines—or of the first bicycles? Forty pounds for a bicycle was cheap. Now, you can buy them for five pounds, and second-hand for a sovereign or two. Why? Because they became popular. Sooner or later the scarcity of servants will force manufacturers to make mechanical bed-makers and vacuum-cleaners cheap."

course has been got ready, and while the party chats in a kind of circle the trap opens and the table reappears—the entrance. It is all so simple."

"Or it might come from the ceiling," said the housewife, with a touch of satire.

But her spouse was not disturbed.

"How odd you should say that! It has come from the ceiling, and in the house in Paris where this system was



Our artist's humorous idea of the bed-making machine of the future.