Manuscript: Wonder Age of Science and Invention

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THE WONDER AGE OF SCIENCE AND INVENTION

WHAT IT MEANS TO THE WOMAN IN THE HOME

Motoring southward recently along the Atlantic Coast, halting where there seemed to be good digging for early American remains, a little party of which I was a member, took a night's lodgings in a rambling yellow colonial house - its main wing clearly 18th Century. There were additions as clearly early, middle and late 19th Century and one blatantly of today - a roomy shiny summer parlor.

The place looked as if it had always been lived in and the changes made to meet the needs and the taste of the successive occupants. It had not a trace of the standardized restoration "time in every detail", which those who build to imitate - rather than to express new effect. This was true of the great lawn about it - for there you saw how each generation had planted what was of its era - box in pre-Revolutionary days, mulberry trees in the 1830's; horse chestnuts and red beeches in the winters.

"Good digging" we had all exclaimed, when we saw the big sign

TOURISTS ACCOMMODATED

LODGING AND BREAKFAST ONLY

and so it proves. but not to me at least in the sense expected. I had not crossed the threshold of the old doorway, with its quaint fan above and its ancient bevelled glass at each side before I sensed in my
hostess - you would have never thought of her as anything else from the moment she gave you her first cordial greeting - something exciting - different. Clearly she was a woman possessed of an idea which she could not wait to reveal. It came out while she settled me in an old fashioned room with a four poster and a chest of drawers, which made my mouth water - but which was equipped at the same time with every known modern electric invention for serving the personal needs of a woman, worn and bedraggled by a day's touring - an electric pad for her "tummy" - electric heater for her night cap glass of milk or what not, electric curling iron for her hair - electric vibrator for her back.

That bedroom equipment was my introduction to what turned out to be the most complete and practical example of "what modern science can do for the woman in the Home", that I have ever encountered and I have looked at more than one widely advertised model. She couldn't keep still about it and in the night and morning I spent with her her experiences in applying modern inventions to a huge and rambling country house came out.

It had begun eight years before when the old town on whose outskirts she lived was first electrified. The main line passed by their door and they put in lights.

"Something fell off me," she said "the first night these lights came on. For fifty years, since I was ten years old, I had filled and cleaned, filled and cleaned kerosene lamps. My mother taught me and I had to do it right and I always hated it, and here in
a jiffy it was all over. I pushed a bottom and we had light — had it
in the cellar, the garret — over the bed to read — in every dark
corner — not at first, but we have now. I used to go over the house
pushing them off and on just for the wonder of it. Women who have
never kept house without electric lights have missed on of the big
experiences of our times — and that is having them.

"Well, those lights gave me an idea. I'd heard about
people who cooked by electricity and I began to read the advertisements,
but electric things cost money and John and I didn't have much. He
though I ought to be satisfied with having lights, so I made up my
mind I'd try tourists — earn enough to pay them out. First I only
gave lodgings. In a month I had enough to buy a percolator and
a toaster. You know I really never had believed they could be as good
as the advertisements said, but they were better. Seemed as if I
could percolate and toast the whole time, it was so wonderful.

That gave me another idea — adding breakfast to
Lodgings to my sign — you see people were always grumbling about
having to go off without breakfast. With these new ways of cooking
I could give them all they wanted — do it all on the table, without
once getting up."

She certainly could. A generous coffee pot flanked by
one of those magical glass kettles — where you can see the water as
it boils — a sight as fascinating as watching a wood fire burning —
gurgled and bubbled before us — an automatic toaster popped out,
bread browned to a turn, and always hot — a procession of big and
little scorching dishes and broilers on the table at her elbow gave
us eggs fried, boiled or poached. There was but one fly in her
electrical ointment. The bacon odor - it did escape, although she
was trying out a contrivance that was solemnly announced to do some-
thing - I don’t know what - with the odor.

"That’s one of the next things science must do for us
women, who take care of our homes, find away of handling smells -
think what it would mean in an apartment house. Why it makes me
sick to visit my sister in the City - odor always getting into the
halls and she’s in a fine place too. This new fangled patented
paper is fairly good to cook in - almost perfect if you’re careful -
still I think they’ll do better - don’t believe there’s anything
they can’t do after what I’ve seen."

"The first real big thing I got off my tourists was
an electric washing machine. I could have cried it helped me.
I’ve got everying now - dryer, mangle etc - all sorts of irons. Come
and see."

The room looked like a miniature model of a steam laundry.

said

"Best part of it", Mary Jane Brown, for that was her name -

"Best part of it is that one can wash and iron and look and feel like
a lady. You can’t when things are sloppy and messy. Why I can do
all the work in this house now without a spot or splatter. These
contrivances make my clothes and my dishes, dust, clean, polish.
I am the directing head of a company of uncomplaining, efficient
helpers. Don’t feel yourself about their doing the work without you."
It's less muscle but more brains, this kind of housekeeping means. You must learn how to use things, how to keep them in order, when to replace them - neglect them and you'll get into trouble.

"When I first got excited about it - I made up my mind to learn all about electricity, so I took a correspondence course - did right well - you always do if you are curious and want to know even if you haven't been to college. I do all my little repairs and changes - has to be something the matter in the main line to shut off this house.

"Take that frigidaire there, connected it up myself.

When I think what it always cost this family to put up ice, how we always worried about whether we'd get any, when it was ready, where we'd find labor, how every year it cost more and more, I never take a cube out of that box without thanking the Lord for what he's led men to do to make life easier for women like me."

I could go on with Mary Jane's wonders, but I soon forgot her contrivances in interest in the woman herself. She had become truly mechanically minded. It came over me with a queer jealousy that she could talk to my little nephews with their amazing vocabulary - their amazing interest in things, which mean nothing to me. She at sixty was more of our day than scores of college women I knew.

And yet electrified as she was, her sense of the past, of her mother's, grandmother's ways, was alive and respectful. She took me to the great garret where had been stored the discarded utensils,
furniture, ornaments of the four successive generations of her family, who had been born, lived and many of them died in the house. She had begun a rough chronological arrangement of the treasure house.

"I got the idea off Henry," she said with affectionate familiarity, with which hundreds of thousands in this country speak of Henry Ford. "Read about his museum and thought I'd have one."

There were the big and little candle moulds her grandmother had used, there were lamps for whale oil sperm, kerosene of scores of sizes and fashion, there were tin lanterns which let their light through holes punched in charming patterns. There were brass bed pans, long handled to warm cold sheets in glacial chambers — chauffrettes, foot stools, andirons of rough hand wrought iron, fire irons pounded bont by blacksmiths — long dead. Franklin stoves, drums, base burners. Of household cooking utensils there was the same procession in wood, pewter, iron, tin, porcelain up to the day of aluminum.

It was in these articles of daily use Mary Jane Brown was deeply interested, not in the broken down Martha Washington table — the crippled chippendale settee, which tantalized me. She had before her eyes the road of labor her mother, grandmother, great grandmother had travelled — the road now made so simple for her by the inventor's brain.

And yet when I went below with her, I saw that the candle sticks on her mantle held real candles, her grate fires were laid with wood. It was not pride in her fine old brass — but because these things still spelled festivity — joy to her.
"You can't have Xmas without candles," she said. "I don't care how comfortable an oil burner makes a house, one wants a fire to look at." I concluded the machine age had not engulfed Mary Jane, however much it had thrilled her.

She had more leisure, saving of back and feet. But what was she doing with the time and strength won? I take it there is the real question in the changes which science and its adaptations have made in the lives of women who run their homes. What will they do with their time? Use it in idleness? Fill it with meaningless amusements? They would better be kept at the old grind for say what you will steady necessary tasks, however little time they leave for the things one wants to do, give a sober dignity and meaning to life — easily destroyed by idleness or silly pastimes.

I did not have time to go into all that with Mary Jane for the road called, still she had there was her correspondence course in electricity. Her "helpers" as she called them, had given her the idea, the time, the money. Then there was her museum - she would never have seen the meaning for her in the story of Mr. Ford's Dearborn museum, if she had not experienced herself the changes inventions have brought to each generation. She was made so alive by the change in her life that she was keen to visualize the lives before her.

I could fill out my picture of her leisure, however, from what I have seen happening to women of her type in various places
since the home as been revolutionized by modern invention. Science had simplified their home but while it was doing that it was offering a rich collection of marvels to fill the leisure gained. There's the telephone and the radio. A whole procession if incidents of the really joyous use, of these inventions by women situated like Mary Jane Brown, flood my memory as I write.

There's my eighty year old Connecticut neighbor who twenty years ago was given a fresh hold of life - an immense new interest by a party telephone line. She could talk with her neighbors when she would! It was unbelievable magic, a stimulating wonder whenever she lifted the receiver - heard a voice. Twenty times a day she ran to the instrument, called up a friend, only to convince herself she had not dreamed an incredible fantasy. Five years ago she was given a radio and from that day her joy and interest in life have doubled. She gets the most solid satisfaction out of hearing presidents and presidential candidates speak and is a frank critic of their radio voices and pronunciation. It seems never to have occurred to her before that "great men" talked like "other people", could squeak or drawl or rear, could mispronounce - slip in their grammar. If disillusioning, it is comforting not so much of a gulf between her and the leaders as she thought!

There has been a broadening and intensifying of her interest in the life of the world - delightful to watch. I remember that afternoon, when we in Our Valley waited in something like anguish for news of an unknown boy, called Lindberg, who was trying
to fly the Atlantic. "It just seems as if I couldn't stand to have him not get there, but of course he never will," my neighbor sighed. Then along about 7 o'clock her radio told her the boy had done the unbelievable, was safe in Paris. Her relief, her sense of the marvel was so great that all the evening she was calling up friends without radios to tell them the great news.

She became air-minded, from that day. Our Valley lies on the route of the New York to Boston air mail service. Rarely do the morning and evening engines roar above that she does not go to the door in silent salute. It is her air-plane!

She has never flown but who does not know of women of years who do regularly. I know of one woman around seventy who has put the car and the railroad almost as completely behind her, as twenty-five years ago she did her horse and buggy and her wheel. She will not take a journey of over a hundred miles in anything but a plane if it can be avoided. As a fact she is establishing a reputation among her grandchildren. "When I was a child" she will tell you "my mother had a brother who had never ridden on a steam car. He didn't believe they were safe. People pointed him out as a curiosity and I was so ashamed of him.

"My children have an uncle who has never been in an automobile and they feel about him, just as I did about my uncle, they're ashamed of him. I am not going to have my grandchildren telling about a grandmother who never flew."

The truth is the grandchildren are much more shocked by her adventurous flying than they would be by her travelling on the ground. But she is but a forerunner. The day will soon be here when
one who has never been in an airplane will be a curiosity.

Most precious of all the gifts science is making to
women is that it is giving them the country under livable conditions.

A recent depressed commenentation on what science is doing
to towns and cities essentially pessimistically if in ten years the
changes were not there would not be untold millions who would never
from "birth to coffin see any wild thing - a self sown tree, a
free bird or even a weed."

The chances are that never in the history of cities did
so many men and women see so much of lovely free wild life as today.
The very forces which have made of the city a bewildering, gorgeous
pageant of noise, speed, crowding, have given city dwellers the
means of escape at least weekly. Never were the fields and
roads, the streams and lakes in every direction around our towns,
factories, mines so filled with people seeking the sight of "self-
sown tree and free bird." More and more of them are sensing too that
the country is becoming more livable under modern conditions than
the town, and are seeking it. Men and women were driven from the
country by its hardships, the hardships one conquered for those who
open their minds to the new ways. Many feel now about being in
the country as Mary Jane Brown said she did about her candles and
her grate fires.

"Once I hated them, because of the inadequacy of their
return for the trouble they gave. A candle never gave light enough
to read by or to work by, a grate never warmed a big room. Their
failure to do well what they were intended for blinded me to their beauty but now that we have electricity for light and an oil burner for heat they are a luxury - I love them."

It is so about the country homes under the new conditions. To live at all in the old days on a farm so exhausted strength and resources that the beauty of field and sky and forest was neglected.

Now every side of life withing and without is eased, energised, intensified. Hardly a utensil which has not been made more efficient. Heavy labor has been stripped of half and sometimes all of its call for long hours and brute strength. "It is like having your cake and eat it, too," one of my country neighbors sighed happily when compressed gas gave her a kitchen fire without constant watching and stoking.

The home has been made more livable and interesting both in town and country and the world has been put within the reach of millions, who once rarely travelled beyond the one nearby town - if there home was in the country - "never went anywhere" if in the City. Professional and business women of all classes, writers, artists, teachers, clerks, are profiting particularly at this point.

Formerly the best they could do with their vacations was to spend it in a hotel or boarding house at the mountains or the seashore. They might or might not be comfortable but they must stay. Could not afford to change. Rarely was there any contacts, which were stimulating. They could not ever get entirely out of the harness for their positions were known. They must live up to them.
These women usually have energy and adventurous spirit. Today it is possible for them to give free play to both. Thousands upon thousands find yearly for a few weeks a complete release from the bonds of professionalism by taking a car and going wherever curiosity and interest call them. Every day of their journeying is rich in the unexpected. What is so invigorating to a jaded mind, to tired nerves?

I know artists who come back every fall from their personally conducted tours with portfolios full of sketches of scenes, which only independent rambling could have yielded — writers and teachers who come back with note books full of fresh observations on men and women in situations they could never have conceived or dreamed.

The woman whose business is a home is getting something of the same color and variety into her more confined life by the same free use, of the car by the family in vacation. The yearly family pilgrimage is as much a matter of course as the annual Sunday school picnic used to be.

I have the pessimist complaining that all of these new forms of amusements and relief are abused — vulgarized — overdone. They are often. It takes time to find out just what a new amusement is worth to you, what is its true relation to your life. Unfortunately science cannot give an instrument to insure wise choice. A woman cannot buy taste, restraint, good judgment. She can waste her new leisure and strength by a silly use of the new devices Science has given her, but science does not force her to spend all her time at the radio or on the
the road - or in the air. She has more time for books, for nature, for friends, for cultivation of all that is worth while than ever before. Whether she lets the forces who gave her this leisure destroy its true value by senseless use of the marvellous devices these forces give her to fill it - is left to her. Making the most of life and its opportunities shall depend upon what we select.