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ROBERT M. GAY

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THE EIGHT FORTY-FIVE

THE EIGHT FORTY-FIVE

*EXTRACTS FROM
THE DIARY OF JOHN SKINNER
A COMMUTER*

BY

ROBERT M. GAY



SKETCHES BY WALLIS E. HOWE

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*These simple suburban adventures
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January

January 2. The lady from whom I rented this house last June told me that it could be heated in winter. The trouble is, she did n't tell me how. Jane and I were much pleased with the house last June, because it was so delightfully antique. The stairway, I recollect, was particularly taking, and so was the wall paper in the south bedroom, with Dutch skating-scenes on it. Skating-scenes are quaint in June; but in January

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one would prefer views of Yuma, Arizona.

When I got home to-night, carrying a ham under one arm and a leg of lamb under the other, I found the house empty, though the lights were burning all over it. Jane telephoned from Mrs. Weston's, up the road, where she'd been watching out for me, that I need n't expect her home until I had the house warm. The kitchen range, which heats the dining-room, was out. Our house, among many diabolical contrivances, numbers a basement kitchen, our food having to be shot up to the dining-room on a dumb waiter. The Baltimore heater in the sitting-room — supposed also to heat the north bedroom — was likewise out.

Bub, my white bull-terrier, came to welcome me and then returned to

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Mrs. Weston's. When I had thawed my hands by holding them over the gas jet in the kitchen, I built a fire in the range and then went to work on the Baltimore heater. I remember how enthusiastic my landlady was about the Baltimore heater: "So much better than an open fireplace, and yet, when the flame shines through the isinglass windows, just how cozy!" As I lay on my back, trying to heave the grate into place after it had fallen out, I remembered her enthusiasm, but my mouth was too full of ashes for me to express myself clearly about it. I thought, however, of several things I would say to her if her husband were not a lawyer.

After I'd got the range and the stove going, I built fires in the fireplaces in the sun-parlor and break-

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fast-room (these are Jane's fancy names for the rooms), and went to look for something to eat; and then I walked down to the back fence to look at the chickens. They seemed entirely healthy and comfortable, sitting there in their coop all fluffed up, and for the first time I realized that there is something to be said for being a chicken.

These chickens were given to us by a humorous friend as a wedding present — sixteen of them, a week old, with their mother, an old Dominique hen named Cluck. Cluck's character is that of a strong-minded woman. Bub looks upon her as a peculiarly evil kind of demon, because she pecks him without provocation and he does n't dare to peck back. Her chicks are now eleven long-legged pullets and five lanky

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cockerels, and they've eaten at least a ton of expensive chick-feed without making any return. My friend says they're "a wonderful laying strain." I hope he's not an optimist, like my landlady.

When I got back to the house, Jane had returned, and Bub came in after a while, tentatively; as if he meant to move out again if the house did not meet with his approval. Jane was not at all pleasant. She was, in fact, peevish. She said the house I'd picked out was a lemon, and she's not usually slangy. I protested that she herself had picked it out because of the stairs, which had mahogany banisters, and the silly wall paper in the south bedroom, which had skating-scenes on it; and she said I knew perfectly well I'd picked it out because of the acre of

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ground, mostly rocks and pebbles, and the chicken-house, which was buggy, and the decrepit old orchard, and the worm-eaten gooseberry and currant bushes, and the well with a sweep that would n't work.



*I pulled my desk up close to the
Baltimore heater*

There's no use arguing with a woman when she's cross; and so I pulled my desk up close to the Baltimore heater and began to work on

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my article on American Chippendale. Bub immediately climbed up in my lap, turned over on his back, and went to sleep with his head in the crook of my left arm. He does this because a draft blows up from the cellar through the cracks in the floor; and though his feet somewhat impede my vision, I have n't the heart to dump him off.

Jane heated three bricks on the kitchen range, wrapped them up in flannel, and went to bed with them, still cross. But as soon as she was warm she relented, and called to me that she forgave me for being so unreasonable. I went up to her and sat by the bed with my feet in a sweater, while she explained that the stoves are so old and rickety that she is afraid to shake them properly, and that they burn out without her

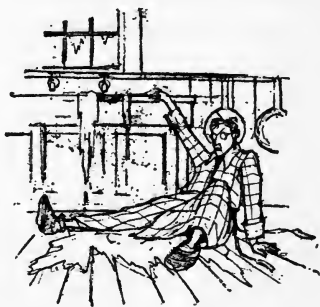
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realizing it, and that to-day the house became so cold that she cried, and Mrs. Weston had called to borrow three eggs and had insisted that she go up there to get warm, and they got to talking of the Women's Club concert, and Mrs. Weston made her stay to dinner because it was my late night, and then I had come home tired and cold and hungry and had had to make all the fires. And then Jane began to blubber, and before long we were so entirely happy again that even the Dutch skating-scenes that surrounded us did not make us shiver. Bub had meanwhile sneaked up on to the bed and was rapidly boring his way down under the covers to the foot.

January 4. The thermometer dropped to six above zero to-day.

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January 5. This morning, when I went into the kitchen to light the water-heater, I slipped on something and fell flat on my back. When I had let in light by opening the shutters,



*I slipped on something and fell
flat on my back*

I found that the floor near the sink was covered with ice. I had left the water running to keep it from freezing, and the outlet from the sink had frozen, producing in time a miniature cascade. When I had removed the ice

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with the garden hoe, I went upstairs to the bathroom to take a bath and found that the tub was half full of ice. I had left the water dripping there too.

I put the ice into the ice box, and went back to bed to consider.

When Jane heard of my activities, she unexpectedly began to laugh and she continued to laugh unreasonably at intervals until I left for town on the eight forty-five.

January 8. For three days now I have been putting in my mornings and evenings wrapping hot cloths round pipes and chipping ice out of spouts, sinks, and tubs. Bub moved out two days ago and has been "living off the town" ever since; but I am proud of Jane. She is playing at being Peary or Nansen, icebound near the Pole, I think. At any rate,

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she's been in a gale of merriment. She is especially amused over my running about with hot cloths, "like a nurse with poultices," she says.

I wrote a letter to the landlady this evening, but Jane was afraid it was libelous and made me tear it up. Do we live in a free country?

January 10. It is warmer to-day, and Bub returned home. One of the pullets, I discovered to-night, was crop-bound. I felt rather proud of knowing what was the matter with it, and Jane was very admiring of my erudition. We took it into the kitchen, fed it olive oil, gave its crop a massage, wrapped it in cotton, and put it on the shelf behind the stove.

January 11. The pullet is doing well.

January 20. The pullet has fallen in love with Jane and spends most of

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its time on the window sill looking at her.

January 25. Bub fought Mrs. Weston's Airedale to-day and licked him. I never did like that woman.



*I sent for seed catalogues and
decided where I would
plant vegetables*

January 27. Jane has had a quarrel with Mrs. Weston, because Bub whipped her dog. I bought Bub a new collar.

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January 31. A January thaw. Windows all open, air balmy, a touch of spring. I sent for four seed catalogues, raked up the garden, and decided where to plant vegetables. Jane is drawing plans of a flower garden, with dots for plants and crosses for shrubs. I could almost smile at the landlady to-night.

February

February 1. Last night Jane and I went to the theatre and, as a consequence, I overslept this morning. I was in the middle of breakfast when I heard the eight forty-five whistling for the Briar Brae crossing, and I left suddenly, without kissing Jane. As I passed Charlie Waterman's house, he came out, tying his necktie. In summer we can make the station in three minutes and twenty seconds; but this morning, because of the ice, it took us over four minutes, and we caught the train only by chasing it and jumping upon the rear platform. Charlie was not in very good form, because he had not had his coffee, and he has reached an age at which not to have had one's coffee makes a

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difference. He sat down squarely in a lady's lap as the train lurched on the curve by the water tower, and at the same instant — by what association of ideas I cannot imagine — remembered that he had once more forgotten to buy his monthly ticket.



*We caught the train by jumping
on the rear platform*

He was, therefore, very rude to the lady, — which was unreasonable, to say the least, — and at last sank into a seat, plunged in black despondency.

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And I was in no mood to cheer him up, because I had discovered that my wind is not what it used to be, and because I had not kissed Jane. I was afraid she might not understand my neglect.

We joined in an antiphonal duet of woe and malediction, the substance of which was, what fools we had been ever to leave the city. "Look at it," said Charlie, waving his hand at the country outside. "Why should anyone come out here so long as he could live in a centrally located jail or lunatic asylum, or even a nice dry barrel!"

"True," I assented, my mind reverting to last night, "a barrel near the theatre district. Jane and I have n't seen the last act of a play this year."

"Play!" he groaned. "Oh, Lord! Play! Wait till you've four kids

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who have to be put to bed, and no cook, and a new nurse every week. Play! Ye gods! Margaret and I have forgotten there is such a word. We've taken to radio and Mah Jong, and the next step in our decline will be solitaire, and then will come blithering idiocy. Last night, when you were enjoying yourselves at the theatre, Margaret suddenly became violent and screamed at me, "For heaven's sake, say something!" And I could n't think of a thing to say. We'd said everything. And so in desperation I hitched up the radio, and what do you think we heard? A lecture on the joys of the farmer's life!"

"By a man who takes good care to live in the city," said I; and so we went on for ten minutes or more.

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In desperation, I hitched up the radio

We were interrupted by Sam Hilliard, who lives at the College Club, near Forty-second street. "I saw you fellows get on," said he, smiling maliciously. "It was worth seeing. Do you do it every day? It's quite a stunt."

We said nothing, but looked a good deal.

"Pleasures of the country, hey?" he went on. "It's interesting to observe how the other half lives.

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Quite instructive. I've been out to see Ned Williams in Briar Brae. Silly name. Get my courage up once a winter. For the rest of the time, prefer sidewalks."

"You're getting fat," said Charlie; "need exercise." This was a keen thrust, for Sam is something of a dandy.

"You're becoming effete," I contributed. "Look at that scene out there," with a proud wave toward the window; "look at those colors, those spaces, those clouds, that sky. Can you see them on Broadway and Forty-second street? No. Nor in the subway."

"Or," said Charlie, unexpectedly becoming poetical, "can you dig in the brown earth in spring, or have the joy of picking beans off your own bean-vines? Have you ever made a

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gravel path or a trellis for tomatoes, or tended a hotbed?"

"Or," said I, "have you ever sat on an evening under your own apple tree, gathered grapes from your own grapevines, or taken a nap on the grass, or experimented with bees, or cured a chicken when it was crop-bound?"

"Oh, of course that's all right, if you like it," he admitted.

"And we do like it!" we exclaimed together, like Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. And now, having recovered our equanimity, we kept at him till we reached Hoboken. Then he surrendered, with the remark: "I see that you fellows are like the Irish lady who would let nobody beat her husband but herself."

When I got home to-night, I found that Jane did not know that I had n't

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kissed her. Can she be growing indifferent?

February 3. Jane's forgetfulness has determined me to buy a motor car. I must not let her get bored, like Margaret.

February 4-18. During these two weeks I've been studying cars. I find that they are all better than any others. Jane is worrying about me. She says I'm acting queerly; but just let her wait till I decide!

February 20. This morning I learned from friends on the train that four cars (the ones they own) are better than any others.

February 21. This morning I learned that three other cars are better than any of those I heard about yesterday.

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February 28. When I got home to-night, Jane met me at the door with the news that we are to have a surprise party. Her chum, Phyllis Raymond, in the city, tipped her off. Being a man, my manner of receiving the news was entirely different from Jane's. I felt that, since we are to have a surprise party whether we want it or not, the only thing for us to do is to await it with as much fortitude as possible. The idea of preparing the house for it never entered my head; but I soon discovered that Jane had been madly cleaning all day. I protested that to pretend that we were always so spick and span was immoral. My sentiments, however, seemed to carry little weight.

Since it is proper at a surprise party to be surprised, Jane and I

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practised expressions, gestures, and exclamations for an hour after dinner. Our method is this. I go to the front door at the noise of the approach, look out with a puzzled look, exclaim, "What in thunder!" and strike an attitude of paralyzed astonishment on the doormat. Then Jane calls, "What is it, Jack?" and I can do nothing but make inarticulate noises until she rushes to the door, bursts forth, and attitudinizes beside me. Even Bub, who looks upon our doings as a kind of game, barks frantically, and Mandy, the colored mammy who has been helping Jane, contributes a "Lawsee!" and rolls her eyes behind us in the doorway. It is very effective.

I engaged Mandy yesterday. Although she is an old flatterer, she has already wormed herself into our

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regard. She praises Jane to me and me to Jane, and, when she knows we are in the next room, praises us both to Bub. "Dawg," she says, in a stage whisper, "yo' suttently has a smaht mass'r 'n' mistis — yo' sho' has. Ah don' wonder yo' is stuck up."



*Our surprise party, last night,
proved a surprise*

March

March 2. Our surprise party, last night, proved a surprise after all. The thermometer had fallen rapidly all day and, by eight o'clock, when our guests arrived in automobiles and with loud whoops, it registered five above zero. Mandy, though she has a magic touch with Baltimore heaters and had worked heroically to have the house warm, was unable to combat the bone-piercing chill that stole in about every window frame and up through the cracks in the floor. To our guests, however, coming in from the frosty air outside, we seemed very cozy — for about ten minutes. Burbage, who is self-appointed spokesman of every gathering, made a neat little speech in

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which he announced that this was in some sense a housewarming, a piece of unconscious irony that became a hackneyed jest before the evening was over.



We were bundled up to our ears, trying to talk brightly

The ladies trooped over the house, as ladies will, exclaiming admiringly, "How quaint! How cute!" and also "Is n't it lovely!" But as soon as they had gathered in the living-room they began delicately to make ex-

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cuses for resuming their wraps, and before long I was urging the men to put on their overcoats, because I wanted to put mine on. Within half an hour we were all sitting, bundled up to our ears, with our feet on the rungs of our chairs, trying to talk brightly without letting our teeth rattle.

Now being the life of the party is not one of my special talents. Jane says that in a crowd I am a perfect stick. And so I suppose it was all my fault that the men sat at one end of the room, and the women at the other, and that the men began to talk about furnaces, and the women about washing-machines. These are hardly the topics one would choose at a surprise party; but our guests were all either young married couples or engaged to be married, and were,

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therefore, more or less insane on home economics. Burbage began it by telling how warm he is with hot water, and Stevenson retaliated with a tropical chant about steam, and then Leonard, who is proud of being old-fashioned, announced that there is nothing quite like hot air. Jeliffe and Buck sided with Burbage, and Morris and Hitchcock with Stevenson. I tried valiantly to be humorous about Baltimore heaters, but all the while I was wondering whether their toes ached as mine did. Meanwhile there floated over to us shrill *pronunciamentos* concerning centrifugal dryers and electric wringers. And then suddenly I began to laugh, because there popped into my head the remark of an old Scotchman who the day before had described an excursion of the United Caledonians

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as a “tur-r-r-ible picnic.” We were having a terrible party, and Jane was casting gorgon and basilisk glares in my direction, which I interpreted to mean that it was all my fault.



*I seized plump Mrs. Jeliffe and
haled her about
the room*

I am naturally a bashful man, but I now did something of which I feel pardonably proud. I rushed to the phonograph, put on the worst jazz record we own, seized plump Mrs.

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Jeliffe, and haled her about the room with such vigor that the rest fled before us as before an avalanche. But they fled into one another's arms, and before long we were shaking the house with our pivoting and toddling, while Mandy delightedly patted juba in the doorway.

From that moment the party was a great success. We ate, dancing, sandwich in hand, sliding down the room and into the dining-room for new supplies, and serving the salad in an improvised cotillion. As a consequence I have found myself a hero in my own household. For once I rose to an occasion, and I feel this morning as a soldier must feel who turns the tide of battle, or an anarchist who has thrown a successful bomb. A man of my parts should go far.

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March 9. The cold snap was short, and for nearly a week we have had warm spring weather. I hired Jim Grady to plough the garden plot once more, to-day, and the earth smelled so good that I sat on the fence and watched him. After a while Weston, who lives up the street, came along.

"You're not hoping to grow anything there, are you?" he asked.

"Of course," said I.

"Can't be done," said he; "full of witch grass."

"I know it," I answered; "that's why I'm having it ploughed so often."

"Well, I wish you luck," he concluded, moving on.

A few minutes later Dr. Snow drew up at the curb in his buggy. "Guess you don't know what you're up against with that ground."

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“Oh yes, I do,” I replied, “witch grass.” “But that is n’t the worst,” he went on. “One of your numerous predecessors planted Jerusalem artichokes there, years ago, and nobody’s ever been able to get ’em out. Still, I wish you luck. Gidap.” And he moved on.

He was hardly out of sight when Paddock, the florist, leaned his elbows on the fence beside me. “Not much use spending money on that ground,” said he; “soil’s worn out and sour and too much in the shade. You can tell by the horse sorrel. And it’s full of cutworms. Still, since you’re set on it, I wish you luck,” and he moved on.

Jim stopped to mop his face. “Regular little Band of Hope, ain’t they?” said he; and I agreed that Mrs. Gummidge was a Pollyanna by

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comparison with my townfolk. Their remarks have determined me, however, to buy a heavy dressing of lime or bonedust, though it will make my garden rather expensive. I tell Jane that I am investing in health, and she asks, "Whose? Yours, or Jim Grady's?" She has n't a high opinion of my agricultural skill.

March 10. Jane and I spent most of the day grubbing artichoke tubers out of the ground and this afternoon Charlie and Margaret Waterman came over to help. Jane has adopted them, so to speak, for she has a notion that they are n't happy. She has arranged that we shall help each other in our gardens, and I must admit that her plan is working well. The Watermans, after we had col-

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lected a bushel or so of tubers, stayed on to dinner and we had a jolly time. Jane says that all they need is a confidant, and she is certain that Margaret has something to tell her. When Jane sets out to do good, she plans with such Machiavellian subtlety that I should be almost immediately out of my depth, and so I can only stand on the shore and watch.

March 15. One of the pullets laid an egg about the size of a walnut to-day. This egg has cost me \$15.16, but friends tell me that it is not standard size for Golden Wyandottes, the breed we own.

March 18-20. Lumbago from grubbing witch grass and artichokes. Lumbago, I find, is a comic disease and never fails to win a laugh from

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the most solemn. It is like having one's hat blow off: the victim never sees the joke.

March 21. Jane is angry because I ordered Lazy Wife peas from the seedsman. She says that a psychoanalyst would perceive why the name attracted me, and that if I think she's lazy, I ought to stay home from business just one day and try to do her work. I learn something about women every day.

March 22. It is with pain that I record that Bub is probably the stupidest dog in America. There may be one or two others as stupid, but it seems hardly possible that nature could produce two heads as solid as his. I have spent untold hours trying to convince him that automobiles are not safe playthings for puppies;

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but he continues to greet each one with *empressement* as it wheezes on second gear up the hill in front of the house. He never barks at it, but merely ambles out at the gate, smiling affably, and sits down in the middle of the road in front of it. He has caused almost every machine in our part of town to stall before our house and my popularity is suffering in consequence.

It is a fact, nevertheless, that everybody loves him; and he suggests the philosophical reflection that we do not love people for their intelligence or hate them for their stupidity. Bub, known universally as a bonehead, manages to remain popular. I myself love him much better than I do some human acquaintances who are trying hard to be intellectual.

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March 26. Mandy, who had not put in an appearance for a week, came this morning, assigning as the reason for her absence that she has had "pneumonia in her haid." This seems hardly probable and I suspect that she has stayed home to enjoy the half ton of coal we sent her during the cold weather. She is an old hypocrite, but she makes miraculous johnnycake. *Query:* In the recording angel's ledger, will Mandy's johnnycake outweigh her hypocrisy? *Answer:* It will, if she gives him a piece.

March 30. Jane has decided to plant an old-fashioned garden at the side of the house. I notice that her plan includes a row of giant sunflowers at the back to hide "the chicken-house that Jack built."

April

April 3. A glorious spring-like day. It looks like snow to-night, but the sunlight is growing yellower, and yesterday I noticed the red noses of skunk cabbage poking through the mud in the swamp by the railroad. The skunk cabbage does not figure in poetry as a harbinger of spring, but to me it is the most cheerful of plants. Thoreau somewhere advises the despondent to go and look at it — from a prudent distance, one would suppose. Certainly its powers of growth during cold weather must indicate a warm and optimistic heart.

I stayed home from the office today to work on my article on Chinese Chippendale, but I had hardly sat

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down at my desk when a ring of little girls outside began to sing: —

“You nor I nor nobody knows
How oats, peas, beans, and barley grows,”

which I had not heard for twenty years at least. And when they came to the part where

“Thus the farmer sows his seed,
Thus he stands and takes his heed,
Stamps his foot and claps his hand,
And turns around to view his land,”

it was too much. I hung out of the window. “Where’d you get that song?” I asked.

And the little mothers’-darlings responded, “None of your business,” and went on dancing and singing: —

“Waiting for the har-vest,
Waiting for the har-vest,
Open the ring and choose one in,
And kiss her when you get her in.”

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However, my vernal mood was unbroken. "Oats, peas, beans, and barley," I said to myself; "good honest old vegetables, especially beans. Somebody ought to write a poem about the bean." And then I wasted half an hour writing such a poem, entitled "A Pæan to a Bæan," and dedicated it to Jane. It was in free verse. But Jane only said that there is a point at which freedom becomes licence, and that my effort was well-nigh criminal.

Nevertheless, I must say a word for the bean. It is a homely vegetable, but I like it better than some that are more fancy. The latter, such as French artichokes, Brussels sprouts, green peppers, cauliflower, and eggplant, I have tried to grow, but in vain; while the bean, whether I try or not, seems to get on very

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well unless I happen to step on it, and even then it does its best, with or without encouragement, being in this respect something like a self-made man. If I buy a dollar's worth of the seeds of some more sensitive vegetable, most of them never come up, and the rest die in early infancy or during adolescence; but ten cents' worth of Kentucky Wonders will grow with such indomitable vivacity that by midsummer I am supplying the neighborhood with string beans. The bean, moreover, has personality. It refuses to stay in the ground, and a week or two after you plant a row, you are surprised some morning to find that all the beans you laid away so tenderly have decided not to remain buried, but are standing on the top of their stems like a regiment of little green June bugs about to take flight.

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This peculiarity of the bean once led Jane into an error. Finding all her beans above ground, she concluded that she must have planted them upside down; and so she pulled them all up, turned them over, and replanted them. But a day or two later, there they were up again! This time she carefully covered them with earth. But when they appeared a third time, she decided to wait and see what happened, though she felt about them as the young man did about Father William: —

“And yet you incessantly stand on your head—

Do you think, at your age, it is right?”

This was some years ago, before I knew her; but now she is a much better gardener than I.

With me, gardening is one element

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in a general spring-fever, which attacks me with virulence about the middle of February and drives me to prodigies of industry until the middle of May. After planting-time is over, however, I begin to think of golf, tennis, and fishing, and then the garden would languish if Jane did not step in and give our green infants the care that only a woman can give. I know all this because we gardened together for two years before we were married. I like to sit under an apple tree and calculate how many pecks of vegetables we shall get, but Jane always proceeds upon the assumption that we'll not get any. She is generally more nearly right than I am.

April 5. Planted lettuce, peas, and Early Rose potatoes. If they

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don't frost or rot, I'll have the earliest potatoes in town. I've been sprouting the seed for two weeks in the kitchen.

April 6. I find that Charlie Waterman planted his potatoes a week ago, but he did n't dip them in corrosive sublimate, and I did mine. Besides, I'll beat him with my peas.

April 10. Jane's birthday. Today, after three months of investigation, I bought a car and drove it home. I had said nothing to Jane, and the effect was all I could have wished. After the first excitement was over, we went for a ride in the country, and had dinner at the Three Pines. As we drove home in the dusk, Jane suddenly began to laugh silently, and it took me a long time to find out why. But at last she told

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me that she was laughing because she had just realized why I had been acting so queerly lately.

“I thought,” said she, “that you were worried about business, or that you did n’t love me any more, or that you were going to have nervous prostration; but now I know that you were only learning to drive.” And then I told her how I had driven into the park lake the first lesson, and had picked a man off the front of the garage the second, and had just missed a policeman the third; and I agreed that all this had preyed on my mind, but that I had tried not to show it. And then I told her how to distinguish the carburetor from the universal joint, just to show her that she need have no fear about my knowledge now, and she was very admiring of my erudition.

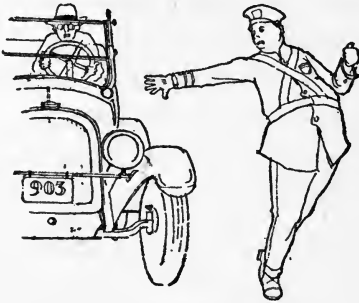
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April 17. To-night Jane dared me to let her read this diary, and of course I had to. Her comment was that any disinterested person who might read it would think her simple. We argued the matter for a long while, I insisting that my diary was not intended for the vulgar gaze and that I was so aware of her courage, intelligence, beauty, neatness, and loyalty, that I did not need to set them down; while she reiterated that I had selected from among all her doings the one occasion on which she had turned over a row of beans. In the end I had to remind her that I had bought her an automobile when I could n't afford it.

April 21. Put in five rhubarb plants to-day in the corner by the chicken runs.

APRIL

April 22. The white birch on the lawn is covered with tassels, and we had dandelion greens for dinner.



"Where d'ye think yer goin'?"

April 23. For the first time I drove to the office. As I was crossing a street, a traffic policeman stopped me and said: "Where d'ye think yer goin'? Did ye suppose ye wor dhrivin' in the Parrrk?" And he made me back to go on the other side of him. As I backed, I stalled the engine and could n't start it again, and half the

THE EIGHT FORTY-FIVE

population of the city stopped to give advice. Finally the policeman came over and told me that I was on dead centre and had better "rock her a little." So I got out, and he and I and five other men rocked her, while one of the latter suggested that I had flooded her with gas and another said it was a wonder I had n't taken the rear end out of her. I said nothing. Otherwise, I had a pleasant drive.

April 25. Planted string beans, celery, salsify, beets, and second-crop lettuce and peas, and helped Jane with her old-fashioned garden.

April 29. Jane has discovered that the trouble with Charlie and Margaret Waterman is too much baby. They have four children and have not been able to find a nurse

APRIL

who suits. And so Jane and Mandy have been borrowing the two youngest, aged two and five, for a day at a time, on condition that Margaret goes to the city. Mandy is in the tenth heaven. As I sat at my desk to-day I heard her on the porch amusing the children.

“Miss. Eliza, is you up dar?” she would call, craning her neck and looking into a tree. “Yes, I is up



Jane and Mandy have been borrowing the two youngest

THE EIGHT FORTY-FIVE

heah; whut yo' want, nigger?" and the babies would shriek with delight.

"Yo' sho is sweet, honey," she would say to the two-year-old, in a voice mellow as brown sugar, "honey, yum, yum. Hit's lucky de bees don' know it." And so on and on, till both fell asleep in her arms.

Mandy was born in slavery on a plantation, though she says she is just fifty years old. But then, I'm not good at arithmetic myself!

May

May 2. Jane gave a tea to twenty-odd of her old college friends to-day and I, seeking a place in which I should be safe from chance introductions, moved down to the hen-houses and whitewashed them inside. Mandy will never grow used to the thought of a "white gen'l'man" doing such work; but she has long since decided that I am queer anyhow, being a literary man of sorts. By being moderately queer in Mandy's presence, I have achieved liberty from the fear of servants that keeps so many men from doing things they'd like to. Whitewashing a hen-coop is so different from my daily work that it gives me profound satisfaction; and I spent a very pleasant

THE EIGHT FORTY-FIVE

afternoon among the chickens, arguing with myself about some chapters in Bergson's *Creative Evolution*, which I read last night.



*I moved down to the henhouses
and whitewashed them*

I had been talking aloud for some time when I noticed a face peering in at a window, and I recognized

MAY

Phyllis Raymond, Jane's chum. How long she had been watching me I did not know, but she was much amused; and she now proceeded to scare me out of a year's growth by announcing that "all the girls" were coming down to see me. Phyllis is a nice girl, on the whole, but her idea of a joke is n't subtle. She taunted me until I chased her to the back door with the whitewash brush, and then realized that the entire tea-party were looking on from the rear windows, as she had intended they should.

Mandy was much shocked, for her sense of decorum was outraged; but Jane was not displeased that her friends should behold such innocent playfulness in her husband.

May 8. The sun was so bright and the sky so blue this morning

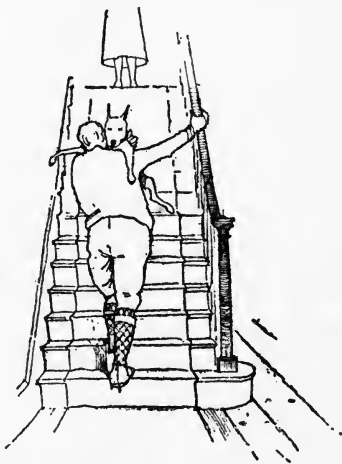
THE EIGHT FORTY-FIVE

that I got up at five o'clock, called Bub out of his basket under the table in the kitchen, and went for a tramp before breakfast. What a morning it was! All the earliest flowers, "whose names are five sweet symphonies," were in bloom — marsh marigold, saxifrage, wake-robin, trillium, spring beauty, and violets, yellow, white, and blue — and robins were calling in the old orchard back of Gray's farmhouse.

By the time we reached home Bub was so much exhilarated that he had one of what we call his "brain-storms." During these spells he careers over the house with such speed that he reminds me of the old picture — by Kemble, was n't it? — of the Negro running away from a ghost and saying to a rabbit in his path: "Git out er my way, rabbit;

MAY

make way fer somebody whut kin run!"²¹ During his progress he rolls every rug up under the furniture, leaps over beds, and falls downstairs, until his breath gives out. It is his rather crude idea of humor. I was passing the time of day with Mandy in the kitchen, when loud shrieks



*I rushed up just in time to
receive Bub in my arms*

THE EIGHT FORTY-FIVE

from Jane upstairs suggested what was the matter, and I rushed up just in time to receive Bub in my arms as he came tumbling down. I cuffed him and sent him to his basket, and then joined Jane where she was kicking the rugs straight in her bedroom.

“Jack,” she exclaimed, “I have an idea!”

I sat down on the bed and waited with some forebodings. Jane always has her ideas before breakfast, when I have not sufficient fortitude to breathe defiance of them; but this morning I was feeling unusually fit because of my walk.

“Well?” I asked, hopefully.

“It’s this,” said she, “I’ve decided that we must build a house.”

This was much worse than I had anticipated.

MAY

"Oh, come," I answered, soothingly. "One will decide almost anything on such a morning as this."

"It's the only sensible thing to do," she went on, poking pins into her hair. "We can't put in another winter in this house, and yesterday I discovered a double lot on Oak Street, where Maple Street and Maple Lane run off from it, and it has old trees on it, and room for a garage and a garden. Come home early this afternoon and we'll go and look at it. Fleming is the agent, and I know his wife well."

At this moment Mandy called us to breakfast.

"But, Jane," I said, when we were seated, "I've just bought an automobile."

"Yes, and ever since we've had it, we've had luck. You've sold more

THE EIGHT FORTY-FIVE

articles in a month than you ever sold in a year before."

"I had to," I answered, "or go broke."

And yet I must admit that I have found a loud howl from the wolf at the door the most effective form of literary inspiration.

"You need something to make you write," Jane went on, "or you'll do nothing but putter about. Oh, Jack, we've got to do it! I've wanted a brick Colonial cottage all my life, and so have you. We married on next to nothing, and look how well we've done! We'll have a white picket-fence in front, just to please you, and you can keep bees. You've always wanted to keep bees!"

And so on and on, until I left, knowing only too well that I should give in.

MAY

This evening we went to look at the lots, and Fleming seemed even more hopeful than Jane about my ability, not only to buy them, but to pay for a house. I realized that for a man of his type financing a building-operation is as easy as falling off a log, and I gathered that it is foolish to worry about money when one may own a Home. I became sarcastic and suggested that I might buy the lot, borrow money on it, put up a house, insure it, burn it down, collect the insurance, build a smaller house, burn it down, and so on, until I had enough funds to put up a permanent one-room home free and clear. But he only smiled painfully at Jane, as if I was sadly puerile, and told me to leave all that to him.

And so I went home to spend the evening figuring, while Jane studied

THE EIGHT FORTY-FIVE

a back number of the *House Beautiful*, which she had kept in her top bureau-drawer because there was a description in it of a perfect little brick Colonial cottage.

May 10. Charlie Waterman and I have devised a game, in order to drown our worries. We call it garden golf; it is played on a thirty-six-hole course, on paper, each hole representing the sprouting or ripening time of a vegetable or fruit. If, for example, my onions appear above-ground before his, I win that hole; if his come up the same day, we halve the hole; and so on. Any form of encouragement to the vegetables is legitimate, and we have some very ingenious rules regarding match play and medal play, bunkers, stymies, and so forth, that add to the excite-

MAY

ment. We also bet a small sum on each hole. I'm two dollars ahead, so far, by a timely use of chemical fertilizers, but will be at least two holes down when Charlie's berries begin to ripen.

Mandy said to-night, "Ah never did see a gen'l'man enthusiasm his gyarden lak Mr. Skinner. Ah 'spec's he done conversin' wid the wu'ms."

May 17. I bought the two lots on Oak Street to-day.

May 18. I went for a walk this evening and, to my surprise, found that I had wandered into the vicinity of our lots.

May 19. I won another hole on Swiss chard to-day, but Charlie won on upland cress, and so he's still two down.

THE EIGHT FORTY-FIVE

May 20. I find that we'll not have to fell any of our trees.

May 25. I find that we can have the house face down Maple Lane to the west.

May 26. Jane and I argued for an hour after dinner over the question whether the house should be all of brick or should only have brick ends. She said that, for a man who did n't want to build, I got strangely excited, and I said that my excitement, as she called it, was due to my natural desire to make my impending financial crash as light as possible. But she only said, "Stuff!"

May 29. Seven men have told me not to build, and six have told me to build. Of the seven, four have houses for sale, and of the six three

MAY

deal in building-materials. This leaves three against three, all presumably disinterested. Jane says that we'll never know whether we ought to build until we do build; and when I ask, "But suppose we find, after we have built, that we ought n't to have built?" she says, "But of course that's nonsense."

I have tried to detect the logic of this, but in vain. It sounds like *Alice in Wonderland*.

June

June 2. At breakfast this morning Jane reminded me that Charlie and Margaret Waterman are coming to dinner to-morrow, and raised the usual Saturday question of what to have for Sunday dinner. We discussed beef, lamb, veal, and pork, finding some reason for rejecting each in turn, and then came round, as we always do, to chicken. In June one becomes, I think, to some extent a vegetable, or at least herbivorous, and nothing seems quite so attractive as a large green head of lettuce. Why not then, I asked, be bold and serve a monstrous big head of lettuce? But Jane thought my suggestion hardly practicable. Most people, she pointed out, are not so nearly

JUNE

vegetarian as we, and some people look upon lettuce as rabbit food. No, there was nothing for it but to get chicken.

And then she made a startling proposal. "How about those greedy young roosters of yours?" she asked.

Now the roosters she referred to are my five pet cockerels that I have reared by hand almost from the egg. They belong to the brood given us as a wedding present, and they are fine, upstanding, conceited, and pugnacious young Golden Wyandottes; but, as Jane intimated, they eat with an enthusiasm that has made me love them less of late than I used to. Two or three of them, fried as Mandy knows how to fry them, would, I agreed, make a dinner fit for royalty.

And so, after a morning in the office during which I purposely dwelt

THE EIGHT FORTY-FIVE

in my mind upon the foolishness of feeding five cockerels any longer, I returned home, quite prepared not only to lead them to the block, but to play executioner myself. But during lunch I found myself remembering how many times these same young cockerels had tried to accompany me to the train of a morning, and I had a vision of their long, yellow, high-stepping legs and their arched black-and-gold necks and their noble though useless tails, and I became depressed and lost my appetite. But I assumed an air of forced cheerfulness, put on my old clothes, hunted up the axe from behind the washtubs in the cellar, and strode grimly to the henhouse, Jane watching me from the kitchen window.

In their separate run, four of the five cockerels were preparing to fight,

JUNE

standing with the beaks almost touching and glaring at one another. They spend most of their time preparing to fight, but their chicken minds are always diverted to some other project



*I hunted up the axe and strode
grimly to the henhouse*

before they proceed to extremities. I had no trouble catching three of them, tying their legs, and laying them beside the chopping-block under the apple tree. And then, feeling like

THE EIGHT FORTY-FIVE

Richard III, Dr. Guillotine, Jack Ketch, and several other celebrities whose names I could not remember, I pulled myself together for the deed, conscious that I must not weaken under the eyes of the wife of my bosom. But I had no sooner stooped to pick up one of the cockerels than the kitchen window opened with a bang.

“Jack,” screamed Jane, “Don’t!”

“Oh, come,” I replied, in a brutal voice, “it’ll all be over in a moment.”

“No!” she insisted, climbing through the window, “I can’t stand it. I could n’t eat a drop, I mean a bit,” and she flew down the path, untied the victims, shooed them into their run, and then looked at me.

“Why,” said she, “you’re white as a sheet. You’d never have done it, would you?”

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“To tell the truth,” I answered, “I doubt it. After all, what’s a little chick-feed, that we should begrudge it to them? Look at them — they’re preparing to fight again!” And sure enough they were.

“Now, is n’t that just like a chicken?” said Jane.

June 3. We gave the Watermans broiled ham and candied sweet potatoes to-day. After dinner, we all went for a ride and, on the way home, stopped to look at our building-lots. It’s odd about those lots. When we don’t see them for two or three days, they always grow much smaller or much larger. To-day they swelled. At dinner we gave Charlie and Margaret the impression that our new purchase covered about five acres, with the result that, though

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they were too polite to say so, they were rather startled when they saw it. On the other hand, when Jane and I are planning what is to go on the plot, it shrinks until we wonder whether there'll even be room for a house; and then, when we see it, it looks like a prairie.

I have also discovered that the trees move at least once a week, the elm and the oak changing places and the two rock maples being on a different spot. Charlie and Margaret won't believe this; but then, they've never owned a building lot. Charlie, who is a good draughtsman, has offered to make a plan, showing where the trees really are, and they're none of them, he says, where I put them on a rough plan I sketched yesterday from memory. I argued that they'd probably moved again;

JUNE

but he's a very matter-of-fact fellow, and pooh-poohed my theory. That's just the trouble with Charlie: he's a realist, and therefore misses some of the fun of life.

I tried to make him see that Jane and I had greatly enjoyed guessing where the trees were, but he only shook his head solemnly and said, "That sounds rather nutty."

"But we are both a little nutty," said I; "that's why we get along so well together. When husband and wife are never quite sure what the other is going to say or do next, married life is not much in danger of becoming humdrum. Jane and I have always rather cultivated nonsense, like this about the trees."

But he only shook his head again and said, "Well, as for me, I like to know exactly where things are."

THE EIGHT FORTY-FIVE

Margaret said nothing, but I caught a startled look in her eyes, as if she'd just realized something.

June 15. The warmest day we have had. As I sit by the open window, the perfume of syringa and honeysuckle floats in, with occasional puffs of what after a good deal of guessing I have identified as the perfume of grape-flowers. It is almost too delicious, and throws one into moods of intense sentimentality, in which one thinks of childhood, old gardens, home, and mother, and one begins to quote the Jessica-and-Lorenzo dialogue from the *Merchant of Venice*: "In such a night," and so forth. But just now a June bug came booming in, bumped against my nose, and fell into the inkwell. I have fished him out, blotted him off, and

JUNE

thrown him out into the night again. Nature mixes a good deal of comedy with her poetry.

June 17. In spite of the gloomy prognostications of my neighbors, I have a garden that people stop to look at. Jane's flowers will, in another month, be a glory. Besides the sweet alyssum that runs all round the border like a wreath of snow, I yesterday found the following in bloom: candytuft, ageratum, forget-me-not, verbena, oxalis, iris, myrtle, crane's-bill, daisy, phlox, and some of the pinks and all of the roses. I suppose one has to know these old flowers in childhood to love them as we do. We can never understand the preference so many people show for gaudy flowers like the dahlia and the gladiolus and the chrysanthemum. These

THE EIGHT FORTY-FIVE

do not warm the heart, however much they may take the eye. We agreed to-day that the little button-chrysanthemums are prettier than their mammoth cousins, and the single wild rose than the double roses of the gardens; and that we had a more friendly feeling for the little butter-and-eggs or snapdragon of the roadside than for the marvelous antirrhinums that one sees nowadays in the florists' windows. Try to substitute — said I — for the flowers mentioned in the following lines, such things as dahlias, gladioli, chrysanthemums, antirrhinums, and other gardeners' delights, and note the effect.

Soon will the high Midsummer pomps come
on;
Soon will the musk carnations break and
swell;

JUNE

Soon shall we have gold-dusted snapdragon,
Sweet William with his homely cottage
smell,
And stocks in fragrant blow;
Roses that down the alleys shine afar,
And open, jasmine-muffled lattices,
And groups under the dreaming garden-
trees,
And the full moon, and the white evening
star.

June 25. If all goes well, we should have potatoes, peas, and cherries on the Fourth of July.

June 28. Is there anything on earth that can quite equal a bowl of strawberries that one has grown, one's self? We managed to collect a pint from our patch to-day. The books say that one should not let the berries set the first season, but the books make no allowance for human nature. Our berries were not very large and not very sweet,

THE EIGHT FORTY-FIVE

and we've been eating fancy berries from Georgia and Maryland and New Jersey for a month; and yet there never were any berries quite like our berries. "A poor, ill-f(1)avored thing, sir, but mine own."



*Is there anything on earth equal
to a strawberry one has
grown, one's self*

July

July 4. I forgot to record that Jane learned to drive last month and passed her examination for a licence a week ago. Her coolness under this ordeal, which shakes the nerve of many a brave man, was remarkable. She seems to have made every blunder possible, stalling her engine, bumping curbs, and slipping back on a hill; and yet the same fatherly old ruffian who has blasted the hopes of half my men friends, passed her. When I asked how he came to do so, she said, "Oh, I told him I could drive very well, but that I was afraid of him; and I smiled at him."

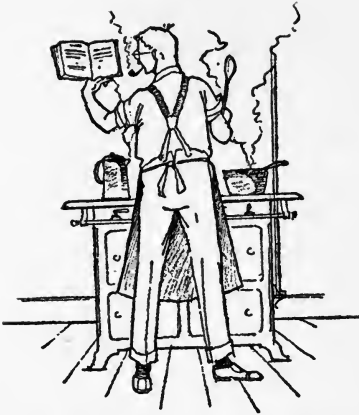
To-day she set out with Phyllis to visit some friends at Loon Lake, driving the car herself. This trip is

THE EIGHT FORTY-FIVE

the outcome of a long discussion, because Jane thought it unfair to leave me alone for two weeks, while I maintained that the change would do her good, that Mandy would take care of me, and that, being alone, I could concentrate on my writing. This last argument convinced her, but she was hardly out of sight when Mandy sent word that one of her pickaninny grandchildren has the measles and that, as there are nine others who may catch them, she thought it best to stay at home. I have decided to say nothing to Jane about Mandy's defection.

July 6. I am learning to cook, and really it is very easy. To hear women talk about it, one would suppose that cooking was an intricate and difficult art. But it is quite

JULY



*All one has to do is to follow
the cookbook*

simple. All one has to do is to follow the cookbook, and the cookbook I am following was apparently written for the feeble-minded. I am glad I was unable to find a cook.

I have cooked over a camp fire, even making baking-powder biscuits and an apple pie, and that is something to tax a man's ingenuity; but

THE EIGHT FORTY-FIVE

cooking on a gas stove is really too easy to agitate one's mind. In camp I used to bake biscuits and pies on a tin bucket that I fished out of the lake one day, and to get them on and off without smoking, burning, or spilling them required finesse. I used the camp spade for this purpose. But in a well-appointed kitchen, with a gas stove and a cookbook, all the romance of cooking is gone.

July 7. I am already such a good cook that I have decided to prepare my own dinners as well as breakfasts. I have to get home in time to feed Bub and the chickens anyway, and the only restaurant in town smells of frying. To-night I had a little steak, with peas and a lettuce salad from the garden.

JULY

July 11. Blessings on the man who invented delicatessen. My cooking is very good, but I find that it takes time, and I need my evenings for writing. And so I have taken to buying my evening meal at a shop in the city and carrying it home.

Cooking would be all very well if it were n't for the washing up. I've used every pot, pan, and kettle in the house and shall have to wait till Sunday to wash them. I manage to keep the kitchen looking neat, however, by putting the soiled utensils in the washtubs and the soiled dishes in the gas-stove oven.

July 12. Jane's been gone a week. I'm lonely, but must not weaken.

July 14. I shall never look at a delicatessen shop again without aversion. The thought of a German

THE EIGHT FORTY-FIVE

sausage, a potato salad, or a pickle, fills me with qualms. All my pathetic cries for help have not availed to procure me a woman to wash the dishes, and so I spent the morning doing them. I soaked them for two hours in the washtubs. I've bought a dozen wooden plates which I can burn.

I've decided that it's bad to eat in solitude so much, and so I went to the golf club for dinner. Why did n't I think of this before? I played nine holes with Hinkson and he beat me.

I can't write. Bub and I sit and glower at each other. I keep thinking of Mandy's cooking. I am growing incoherent.

July 15. Jane has decided to stay a week longer, since I am doing so well. I told her I was doing well.

JULY

I had dinner to-night with the Watermans and in the middle of the meal they received a telegram from a nephew announcing that he is coming for a visit. His name is Egbert and he is a freshman in college. Charlie and Margaret immediately lost their appetites and I learned after some questioning that Egbert has a way of inviting himself like this and that he plays on a saxophone. Moreover they really have no room for him, now that for the moment they have a nurse. There seemed to be no way to head him off, and so I suggested that they send him over to me, since I had almost too much room. They jumped at the offer, and at ten o'clock, while I was working on my article, Charlie and Egbert came in.

THE EIGHT FORTY-FIVE

Egbert is certainly a freshman — fresh as new-mown hay. He called me “old man,” said I lived in a nice old dump, referred to my head as a bean, and assured me that we’d soon be the best of friends. I showed him to his room and left him, hoping he’d stay there. But he did n’t.



He is sitting with his feet on the window sill, practising on the saxophone

JULY

His heart was full of sentiment, which he wished to share with me, and I've been listening for an hour to descriptions of certain dolls and skirts he met at the junior prom. Now he is sitting in his room with his feet on the window sill, practising on the saxophone, for he hopes to make a place on the jazz orchestra next fall. I think he will succeed, for surely no one can make worse noises than he.

July 20. Egbert is still with me. I think he looks upon me as an old man, probably senile, and innocently bucolic, and he is doing his best to initiate me into the ways of the world.

July 22. I took Egbert to the Follies to-night and his remarks about the chorus were so shocking that I think he must be singularly

THE EIGHT FORTY-FIVE

innocent. "This was sometime a paradox, but now the time gives it proof." When I asked Charlie Waterman on the train this evening why he had not warned me against this young plague of Egypt, he laughed malevolently and said, "I was only afraid you might change your mind, and that we'd have to have him after all. You have my permission to kill him painlessly, if you can do it without getting found out. I'll never tell."

Still, I'm growing rather fond of Egbert: he weeded the garden to-day, and I consider that truly handsome in a man of the world.

July 23. Egbert and I put in two hours this evening, working in the garden. It was a beautiful evening, with a full moon rising, and this and the perfume of honeysuckle touched

JULY

unexpected springs of poetry in Egbert's bosom. He leaned on his hoe handle and told me that this was really the life, — a life in which



*He told me that this was really
the life*

a fellow became conscious of his better self, — and that he thought he'd go in for Art next fall. No more of the jazzy life for him. A fellow ought to think of high and noble things more often and not be always

THE EIGHT FORTY-FIVE

jazzing round. A fellow ought to study more and read good books and be an influence, instead of following the vulgar herd and always jazzing round.

I've felt the influence of full moon and honeysuckle myself, and forebore to smile. Egbert has not practised on his saxophone to-night.

July 24. Jane unexpectedly returned to-day. Said she could n't stand it any longer. Her emotions over the appearance of the kitchen and of Egbert she disguised as well as she could, and after a few hours she was glad she was back.

July 28. Egbert left to-day, and Bub, who has been sleeping in the attic lately, is once more on the living-room rug. The house seems very still. Peace, perfect peace!

August

August 1. A red-letter day, because we began digging our cellar. I mean that Mr. Murphy, the contractor, began — or rather that Mr. Murphy's men began, for I have never yet caught Mr. Murphy doing any work. He never in his life, so far as I know, has done any work, but he always has shown genius in persuading others to work for him, ever since when, at the age of six, he organized a newsboys' union and permitted other boys to sell papers for him. He told me his entire history, while we sat on a log and watched his slaves breaking ground with a plough.

It all began with his telling me how much he admired Jane. I knew

THE EIGHT FORTY-FIVE

that Jane had been pulling his leg, but did not realize how scientifically she had done it until he told me that she was a fine woman. I had declared



*We sat on a log and watched
his slaves*

at breakfast that it was a shame the way she soft-soaped Mr. Murphy, but she had only smiled enigmatically. Her interest in his seven children and three grandchildren was sudden and profound, but to me it

AUGUST

did n't ring true; and yet within a day he was bringing her boxes of gooseberries from his garden. He has set his heart on getting us into our new house by Christmas, and he drives his minions (mostly Italians) with barbaric whoops and yells from his log, which is decayed enough to be comfortable.

Jane is Machiavellian, but she has met her match in Mr. Kilby, the architect. Mr. Kilby is the incarnation of tact, which has been defined as the oil that lubricates the social machinery. He has his oil-can always with him, and to watch him work is a study in social engineering.

His plans provide for separate living-room and dining-room, but Jane and I had recently seen Jack Kirchwey's house, in which they are one big room, and had set our

THE EIGHT FORTY-FIVE

hearts on that arrangement. Mr. Kilby did not refuse or even object. He never objects. He simply talks, quietly, pleasantly, unintermittently. But when he was through on this



*Mr. Kilby is the incarnation
of tact*

AUGUST

occasion we had seen that our idea was almost silly, and had agreed upon a breakfast alcove between the kitchen and the dining-room, with folding table and settles, a casement window, and a box of flowering plants. Charmed by his eloquence, we already felt the soft south wind stealing in, perfumed by the flowers in the box, while we sat eating our breakfast bacon and looking forth upon our rear lot, with the clump of pin oaks spreading umbrageously. It was only some hours later that we realized that in all our negotiations with Mr. Kilby he had always placidly done as he pleased.

And yet Jane thinks up a new idea, which she calls thrilling, every day and, until she sees Mr. Kilby, is sure she can persuade him to adopt it. To watch her applying her oil-can

THE EIGHT FORTY-FIVE

to him and to watch him reciprocating, in a kind of oleaginous fencing-match, is a spectacle I never tire of. But I always know how it will end. If Jane has thought of a clothes closet which will alter the shape of the upper hall, she obtains an ironing-board cabinet in the kitchen; if she has dreamed of a fireplace in the guestroom, which would necessitate the building of a separate flue, she receives a window seat with a mouse-and-moth-proof clothes-chest under it. But she admits Mr. Kilby is always right.

August 10. Jane and I have fallen into the habit of visiting new houses, to get ideas for our own. If the agent is about, we explain that we have no intention of buying; but he never believes us, even though we tell him

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that we are building. He is usually a young man of confidential manner, very natty in dress, and carefully instructed in "selling-points."

"Combination gas-range and fireless cooker," he says, incidentally, as we pass through the kitchen, or "fireplace damper, operated from the outside," as we are about to leave the living-room; and, just to please him, I always open all the doors of the gas-range and turn the handle of the fireplace damper. This makes him feel that his salesmanship is effective. "You know, I warned you," I say, meanwhile, "that I am not a prospect." A prospect in his language means a prospective purchaser or, perhaps, an easy mark.

"That's all right, that's all right, Mr. Er-r-r — oh, yes, Mr. Skinner. Delighted to show you about. Now,

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Mrs. Skinner, here is something the ladies are always interested in. What do you think of that for a closet?"

Poor, earnest, optimistic young man. I fear that this practice of ours is hardly moral.

August 12. To-day Jane and I went to look at some "small houses for people of moderate means," and discovered that they are priced at from \$35,000 to \$75,000. They certainly were ducky, as Jane said, but no prettier than ours will be, which will cost \$15,000. But from them she brought away enough wrinkles and kinks to keep Mr. Kilby tactful for two weeks to come. I have decided to discourage these excursions. We have already adopted so many conveniences that I am afraid our house will be too perfect.

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“Jane,” I said to-night, “if we don’t look out, we’ll be like the man in the old story who had so many mechanical devices in his house that all he had to do was lie in bed and press buttons. You remember that after a day or two he found even pressing buttons so much of an effort that he had to hire a man to press them for him. Let’s leave a few things to do after we’ve moved in.”

“Yes,” said she, “I’ve been thinking of that myself. I suspect that one great danger in building a house is that it will be too finished to be interesting. We want a house that will grow with us and will gradually take on the impress of our personality.”

And she preached a very neat little sermon on domesticity, which

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I found quite edifying. But half an hour later, looking over a magazine, she suddenly exclaimed, "Here's an idea! We *must* have this! Open-front drawers in the linen closet!"

August 17. The cellar is all dug and the concrete work has begun. For two weeks past we have talked nothing but House. "John," says Jane, at breakfast, "a cold-closet in the cellar!" "That's so," I respond. "Where shall we put it? Make a note of that, to ask Kilby." And then we draw plans of the cellar and discuss them until I leave on the eight forty-five. "Jane," I exclaim at dinner, "an ash-chute for the fireplaces! Is it in the plans? We must ask Kilby."

Even Mandy is in a state of excitement over the house and goes out

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of her way toward home to see how matters are progressing. To-night, at dinner, after listening to our discussions as she waited on table, she cleared her throat politely and said, "'Scuse me fo' speakin' up, Mr. Skinner, but how many rooms has yo' got in dat house?"

"Seven," said I, "with two unfinished in the attic."

"Mmm," she responded, and went into the kitchen.

"Why do you ask, Mandy?" I inquired when she reappeared.

"Dinin'-room, settin'-room, kitchen, pantry," said she; "baf-room, yo' workroom, bedroom, guestroom. Hmmm."

"Well?" asked Jane.

"I was jes' meditati'n', ma'm," said she, and went into the kitchen again.

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“What’s she thinking about?” asked Jane. “Give her time, give her time,” I advised.

“Do you think we ought to have more rooms, Mandy?” I asked when she came back.

“I was jes’ wonderin’,” said she, rolling her eyes solemnly at Jane, “wha’ yo’ playroom?”

“What on earth do I want with a playroom?” asked Jane, laughing. But Mandy only became still more solemn and stalked out into the kitchen.

August 24. I spent an hour with Mr. Murphy on his log this evening. The men had left off work, but he was resting. I told him, upon his inquiring, that the house is to be all-brick Colonial, with a portico in front and a porch on the side —

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dark-red brick, with white trim; and that there is to be a white picket-fence all round, a brick garage, and a kennel for Bub, and chicken-houses, painted white-and-green, at the rear of the plot. He did not seem much impressed and I gathered that his tastes ran to something more flamboyant. By some obscure association of ideas, he asked my business, and I told him that I was an editor and author.

“You don’t say,” said he; “I somehow thought ye were a minister.”

“Far from it,” said I; “I could no more preach a sermon than — than boss a construction gang.”

“Maybe they’re not so different at that,” he returned with a grin. “In both ye tell people their sins. Well, well, every man to his trade.

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I've read only one book in me life and that was what they call a novel; I dunno what it was about, some dumfoolery or other; but now, what wid this Prohibition and one thing or another, I may take to readin' meself."

I prize Mr. Murphy's company, because he feeds a hunger in me for nature uncontaminated by culture. He's honest, like onions and potatoes.

September

September 3. Charlie and Margaret Waterman dined with us last night, and Fred Kirchwey, who is an architect, came in during the evening. We all walked over to look at the new house, of which the timbers of the first story are already in place. Fred spoke with professional tact of Kilby, our architect, but I could see that he disapproved of the house. His idea is that Colonial dwellings are an affectation in twentieth-century America. Ever since he separated from his wife he has been trying to found a new school of architecture, and he has some very original notions. The only trouble is that he cannot get any clients.

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He says that our domestic styles are all derivative or imitative, and that we must develop a new style that shall express our contemporary spirit. This style he described sometimes as "non-Euclidian" and sometimes as "fluid." His own house, which he built before his separation, is Spanish Mission; but he says that as soon as he can make enough money he will rebuild it on fluid lines. His plans, of which he has sketched about a hundred, give one a pleasing sensation of attending the Chauve-Souris after having taken several cocktails, and they have, I must admit, a certain insane charm. The main principle of his art is that a domestic dwelling should have no angles, because angles suggest hardness, fixity, and asperity. Lived in an angular house, he says, life quickly

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becomes angular. I cannot prove that he is wrong, though Charlie Waterman pronounced his theory pure bunk.

We all fell to discussing the expression of personality in house-building, and I mentioned my love of cupolas. "I know that a cupola is seldom beautiful," I said, "and yet I have always dreamed of owning a house with a square one on top, with windows facing the four winds of heaven. I should enter it through a trapdoor, by means of a ladder, and once in, should pull up the ladder and sit on the trapdoor."

"Oh, indeed!" said Jane.

"And he's been married only a year," said Margaret.

"Beginning to grow angles already, I'm afraid," said Charlie.

But Fred, who is always serious, wanted to know why I should n't

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have a cupola if I wanted it. "A square cupola is a survival of a barbarous age," said he, "yet there's no reason why a cupola may not have fluid lines. But the point is that if a man wants one, no conformity to an architectural style should deprive him of it. A house should be made for the man, not the man for the house. This is a truth that we in America haven't yet discovered. We build for the neighbors, because we want them to think we have good taste. That's all wrong. If we have good taste, well and good; if we haven't, we can at least be honest and build what we like, even though it's ugly. Put a cupola on your house, John, and get rid of a complex."

"The only trouble with that, Fred," said Jane, "is that if he does, I shall have the complex."

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“Now I,” Fred continued, imperturbably, “have always wanted to surround my grounds with a seven-foot, vine-grown, brick wall. I should like to shut all my neighbors out.

‘Not that I love them less, but they
Being fenced away,
'Tis sweet to feel in — oh, how small a
round
May peace and joy abound!’

Many people feel as I do. But we are afraid to build such a wall, because here in America a desire for privacy is always interpreted as snobbery. And so we lay out suburbs where there's no privacy at all. My grounds run into my neighbor's and his into somebody else's until the general effect is that of a public park — the same formal planting, and rolled lawns, and trimmed walks,

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everything except a soldiers' monument and a band-stand. No true individuality anywhere. Why, a patch of scrub oak, sassafras, and huckleberry is more interesting than that!"

"Well, Fred," said I, "we could n't afford the wall, but we've compromised on a white picket-fence, and I think I'll plant a hedge behind it. If the neighbors can only see over it, they won't mind."

"Oh, I hate walls and fences," said Margaret. "They seem so undemocratic. It seems to me a very beautiful American trait that we can live as we do without them and still not quarrel."

"There's something in that, Margaret," said Charlie. "Good fences are just as likely to make bad neighbors as good neighbors. My father

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quarreled with a neighbor for twenty years over a high board-fence, because they could never agree who should keep it in repair. At last one night it blew down, and they never quarreled again."

To-night I've been pondering over our conversation and have concluded that there is something in Margaret's idea. An Englishman spoke not long ago of our "suburban gardens running into each other without hedge or fence to separate friend from friend or enemy from enemy"; and here in town there is hardly a boundary line marked by anything more impassable than a knee-high privet hedge. Indeed, the hedges are as a rule planted anywhere rather than on boundary lines. I suspect that Margaret hit on a national trait and that a democracy is suspicious of

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fences. Certainly, from Fred's brick wall to a feudal moat and barbican is not a long step.

I'm afraid I'm not a true democrat. At any rate, I shall cling to my picket fence.

September 10. When I got home to-night, I found Jane in tears. Mrs. Weston, who lives up the street, called this afternoon to ask Jane to take the chairmanship of the literary section of the Woman's Club, and Jane declined the honor. Pressed for her reasons, she replied with her usual honesty that she was n't interested. She might, of course, have given all sorts of reasons that were n't genuine, but she chose to tell the truth.

Now Mrs. Weston is a woman who boasts that in club work she never takes "no" for an answer, which

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means that she wheedles, bamboozles, or scares her victims into acquiescence with her plans. In Jane, however, she met her match for once. She chose to be shocked over Jane's lack of interest, and she preached in a sweetly modulated voice about public spirit and self-sacrifice and doing good to others until Jane could stand it no longer and flew into a rage, and told her that she thought the literary section of the club was a joke. "If women want to read or study," said she, "why don't they do it at home, without all this folderol? You know perfectly well that they don't want to. They want somebody else to do it for them, so that they can sit and listen to lectures with folded hands, and nod their heads, and murmur, 'How sweet!' and 'How true!'" And she said

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several other things that she really did n't mean, with the result that Mrs. Weston left, walking stiffly with her nose in the air.

"I said awful things to her, Jack," said Jane, "and all because she exasperates me past endurance. And you know what a tongue she has. She'll tell everybody and I won't have a woman friend in town."

"Nonsense," said I. "They all know her and all know you. Perhaps you were n't very tactful, but what you said was n't so far off the truth at that. Cheer up. We've got the Watermans and Fred and the Burbages and the Stevensons and the Leonards and the Morrises and the Hitchcocks anyway, and they'll think what you said a good joke."

After a while she began to smile again. "You know, Jack," said she,

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“perhaps the best way to have peace in a town like this is to insult a few people so badly that they won't speak to you again.” And I agreed that there was something to be said for the method.

September 11. Jane reports that Mrs. Pope, president of the Woman's Club, snubbed her to-day.

September 12. Mrs. Slater, who is at present chairman of the literary section, passed Jane without speaking to-day.

September 13. The three ladies who read papers on *Peer Gynt*, *The Great Hunger*, and *The Growth of the Soil* at the last meeting ignored Jane at the Women's Alliance tea at church to-day. Jane says she feels like a leper.

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September 24. Jane and I sat on Mr. Murphy's log this evening in the twilight and planned color schemes for the rooms in the new house. Jane wants the living-room walls to be "a nice warm gray," with lavender-and-green hangings. It sounds chilly to me, but I did not express my preference for turkey red.

October

October 1. Jane and I have resolved to keep a budget. Every family nowadays keeps a budget, as once it kept a dog. It is a rather terrifying monster, and I have not yet decided whether it is most likely to drive husband and wife closer together or farther apart in mutual consternation. However, we shall soon know. The trouble with Jane and me is that we are both temperamentally extravagant and optimistic, loving to spend money, and inclined to spend it even before we have it, with the result that thus far our family motto has been "Charge, Chester, charge." But to-day we had a shock. Mr. Murphy's bill for excavating proved much larger than

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his estimate, because he came upon a ledge of rock in the cellar and had to blast it out.

We had a serious talk after dinner. I said: "A philosopher has said, Jane, that the secret of a happy marriage is for the husband and the wife never to have a headache at the same time; but I know a better one than that. It is that a spendthrift ought always to marry a miser. Now we are two spendthrifts who went and got married, with the consequence that each eggs the other on in committing his bosom sin of spending. We must reform. Our marital barque has already hit a sunken ledge, though without much damage; but let us trim ship, lighten ballast, and — and — so forth, before — before —" but here I became so involved in metaphor that I had to pause.

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“Before we land at the poor-farm,” said Jane. “You are right, Jack. And I’ve just got a household-budget plan from the insurance company that is just the thing. The first thing we’ve got to do is live within your salary, and not spend the extras you make. We must put those into the savings bank to meet the second mortgage.”

Of course I agreed, and we have been working all the evening on a budget plan. First we drew a diagram representing our income, and divided it into sections which Jane colored with crayons and marked:

RENT AND COMMUTATION

HEAT AND LIGHT

CLOTHING

DOCTOR AND DENTIST

RECREATION

PETTY EXPENSES

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and so on, as the insurance expert advised. When it was done it looked very pretty. Next Jane fetched eighteen envelopes, which she marked with the same headings. And then she unearthed a big blankbook, which I bought ten years ago to use as a commonplace book of my reading (I have used two and a half pages), and I ruled it in eighteen columns and printed our headings neatly across the top and the days of the month down the side. These operations gave us so much satisfaction that we felt that we were already well on the way to financial security; but Jane was so exhausted that she has gone to bed.

October 4. To-night Jane and I found our first opportunity to continue our budgeting. We attacked

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first the problem of what our personal allowances ought to be, for we early decided that everything depended on these. Here has always been our worst leakage, for though we have plain tastes in food and clothes, we have horribly fancy tastes in cigars, candy, plays, books, concerts, flowers, magazines, cigarettes, bric-a-brac, tobacco, vases, rugs, pipes, aluminum ware, china, silverware, pictures, refrigerators, kitchen cabinets, and neckties. Some of these are hardly personal expenses, but they indicate our failings. We decided, therefore, to restrict ourselves to a very small allowance a week for the present for all strictly personal petty-expenses, exclusive of food and clothing; and though neither of us has the faintest idea of what we usually spend, the amount we agreed upon seems ample.

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By also cutting down our food bill five dollars a month and our clothing bill a hundred a year, we can, Jane has proved, just manage to live within my salary.

Having solved all our difficulties so cleverly, we went over to look at the new house by moonlight, and found that it is really beginning to look like a house, and not so much like a brick cistern. We were so relieved in mind that we sat for an hour on the log holding hands, for all the world, as Jane said, as if we were still engaged.

October 5. It so happens that I am not good at arithmetic and that Jane is. She has quite a head for figures, and can always remember whether we spent \$7.98 or \$9.87 at a hotel, while I always forget before

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we have driven a mile on the road. And so I have decided to carry a little notebook in my pocket, in which to put down my strictly personal expenses. If I have any of my allowance left over at the end of the week, I shall put it aside toward my clothing fund. To-day I spent a quarter for something which I forgot to record, and I've been trying all the evening to remember what it was. At last I've remembered that it was cough-drops, but my mind is so much excited that I shall have to read a modern realistic novel for an hour. That always puts me to sleep.

October 12. Jane has a new play-thing. It is those eighteen envelopes I spoke of the other day. I can think of few things that would drive me

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crazy with greater celerity, but Jane likes them. The idea of the envelopes is that they represent the various departments of current expenses, some of them containing ready cash and some slips of paper that represent sums in the bank. Out of them Jane pays her bills. When she has to borrow from one envelope to help out another, she puts a pink slip in to mark the operation.

To-day, when she was out, I paid the iceman out of the Recreation envelope and forgot to put in a pink slip, with the result that Jane experienced a bad hour trying to find out why we could n't go to the theatre to-morrow. When at last I remembered, I received a lecture that I well deserved and gave a promise never to touch the envelope-box again. "However massive your mentality

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may be, Jack," said she, "it is incompetent to cope with problems of elementary arithmetic. I think I'll start a new envelope just for you to make mistakes out of." This was severe, but I consoled myself by declaring (to myself) that the arithmetical mind is a very low order of mind anyway. Jane has never been able to understand why I cannot keep a checkbook properly or why, if I make a mistake of ten dollars one month, I correct it by adding or subtracting ten dollars a month or two later, when I get my balance at the bank, without bothering to find out where it went. I tell her that the bank is much more likely to be right than I, to which she heartily agrees, but says that keeping a checkbook like that is "just sloppy."

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October 22. As usual, Jane persists in surprising me. She has kept faithfully within her budget for two weeks, and I confess I had not expected it of her. I tell her that she is becoming a scrimpy old tightwad, for I thought of a remarkable plan for a picnic and she refused to go because we had only sixteen dollars left in the Recreation envelope. She was entirely calm, even bland, about it but put her foot down hard. "That trip would cost at least fifty dollars," said she, "and may be possible next spring; but if we go now, we'll have to borrow from DOCTOR AND DENTIST, and we won't. So that's that."

Of course she's right and I'm proud of her, but I did n't tell her that I'm having a hard time over my allowance. In order to avoid complications, I agreed to pay for

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my lunches out of it, receiving a special apportionment for that purpose. With luck, I may pull through. But I owe Charlie Waterman a lunch and, after dodging him at noon for three days, I told him to-day why. He laughed vulgarly about it.

“So that’s why you’re rollin’ them?” said he at last, referring to the fact that for a few days past I’ve been carrying a bag of Bull Durham.

I pretended to be as much amused as he. “If I keep to crackers and milk until the first,” I said, “I’ll just manage on my allowance. Besides, my health’s improved since I began eating them.” And he laughed again.

“Well, Jane’s a great girl,” said he. “I take off my hat to her. If she’s made you count your cash,

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she's worked a miracle. But I hope to heaven she'll keep it dark from Margaret."



*To-day I noticed that Charlie is
smoking a pipe*

October 29. To-day I noticed that Charlie is smoking a pipe. I questioned him, and at first he was evasive; but at last he pronounced the

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one word, "budget," and I understood. To my surprise, far from blaming Jane, he was very solemn about it, and told me that she was "dead right." "Margaret and I," said he, "have turned over a new leaf. We worked it all out last night, and we're all on allowances, even the children. Come on; let's have an orgy of crackers and milk."

November

November 1.

“The melancholy days have come, the
saddest of the year,
Of weeping woods and wailing winds and
meadows brown and sere,”

we used to recite in school. But I never took much stock in such morbid sentiments then, and take even less now. In those days we were supported through the month by the anticipation of Thanksgiving Day and Christmas, and nowadays I am too busy to succumb to anything like “cold November’s chilly blast.” Besides, in November an open fire of an evening has sufficient novelty to compensate for rain out-of-doors all day. We have no open fire in the living-room, but we have a Baltimore heater.

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Jane and I were laughing at dinner over our sufferings last winter, when the pipes all froze and the heaters did n't heat and the guests at our surprise party had to wear their overcoats and dance to keep warm. We can laugh now, for we have only one month more in this house and shall move into the new house before the rigors of winter begin. Meanwhile, the Baltimore heater, which we execrated last winter, is very cozy just now with the red coals shining through the isinglass of the doors.

November 3. We spent the afternoon digging dahlia tubers, hanging geraniums in the cellar, and potting English ivy, which Jane plans to train on little green trellises. As a consequence of our labors, we were pleasantly tired and spent a chummy

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evening before the fire with Bub dozing at our feet. We discussed the furnishings of the new house, or rather, Jane described them to me. I have adopted a policy of noninterference, except with regard to my bedroom and my workshop, as I call the room in which I write. I used to call it a "den," but Jane objected to the word as plebeian. It originated, she suspects, among English husbands, such as are portrayed in American novels, who growl and comport themselves in general as bears. They were assigned a special room in which to sulk. And so I call my room the workshop. Jane says it is and probably always will be an awful-looking place; but I love it, because in it I can throw things about as I please, pile books on chairs and on the floor, and sprinkle tobacco everywhere.

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November 10. For months Jane has been picking up bargains in old chairs, bureaus, tables, desks, and knickknacks. To-day she bought a rush-bottomed chair at the Salvation Army junk-shop for fifty cents. It is a very good chair, except that it has at present no rush bottom and is painted a brilliant green. When I asked why she called it a rush-bottomed chair when it has no bottom whatever, she replied that it is the kind of chair that cries aloud for a rush bottom, and that she knows a blind woman who will put one in it. The green paint she will remove with a vile-smelling liquid she has, and she will then paint it herself with black enamel, gold lines, and pink-and-blue flowers. It will then fit into the reception hall in a way that will surprise me.

THE EIGHT FORTY-FIVE

November 16. We have an attic full of Jane's bargains. The other day even I bought one — a clock — for two dollars and sixty-five cents. Jane and I are really not mercenary as a rule, but I find that I sit and look at my clock with a swelling of the chest such as I should never feel if I had paid twenty dollars for it. This is very curious. I think that it must be an essential part of the pleasure of the chase known as antique-hunting. My clock is made of mahogany and has two little peaks or minarets of apple-wood stuck on top, and on the door, a picture of what looks like a striped hyena playing with a boa constrictor. But part of my pride in my clock is due to the fact that it goes and that I made it go. I took the works out, boiled them for half an hour on the gas stove,

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washed them in kerosene, boiled them again, and oiled them, and they have been going now for two days. Jane says I am welcome to the old thing for my den—I mean workshop.

November 17. To-day I escorted Jane on a hunt for a bureau for the guestroom. We visited some remarkable places. One shop in particular, kept by an ancient Armenian named Badasoukian, or something equally euphonious, under Brooklyn Bridge, filled me with qualms. It looked like the kind of place in which victims are drugged every night, robbed, murdered, and dropped through trapdoors into the river. But Jane was fearless. The old gentleman who keeps the shop is honest so far as the quality and genuineness of his antiques are concerned, but Oriental in

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his love of bargaining. After an hour or two we departed with a more or less Heppelwhite bureau, and a walnut armchair and a gold picture frame on the back seat of the car, and an oak chest tied on the running-board.

We created a mild sensation as we drove homeward through the financial district.

November 21. The house is practically completed, except as regards windows, paint, plaster, and wainscoting. We went over it from attic to cellar this evening, climbing like mountain goats over plank bridges, ladders, and scaffolding. The front and rear gardens are a waste of mud, enlivened with patches of lime and mortar and red circles of brick dust. Building a house is evidently a mere bagatelle compared with finishing it.

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I expect to be finishing ours for the rest of my life; but Mr. Murphy, who happened to stroll past just as we were hanging out of a bedroom window, said that he considered our grounds a very tidy job compared with most.

He begins grading to-morrow and we spent half an hour discussing the best methods of protecting the trees and of preserving a natural "lay of land." Jane and I have agreed that we want no "landscape gardening" and we carefully explained to Mr. Murphy that we desired no lawns "as flat as your hand," such as he seems to hold the last word in beauty. He thinks us a little insane, I think. He would like our land to slope smoothly and gradually from the house to the fences all round, with geometrical beds of ornamental plants

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at measured intervals on all sides. As he talked I had a vision of banks of cannas and coleus here, and clumps of variegated shrubbery there, with a weeping mulberry in the middle of the front lawn, a castor-oil plant on one side, a cut-leaf maple on the other, and a copper beech at the rear. The thought was too horrible to contemplate, and Jane and I almost ran to Mr. Kilby's house to beg him to lay a restraining hand on Mr. Murphy. He soothed us gently, pointing out that Mr. Murphy was merely a tool or implement in his hands, and that not a huckleberry bush would be removed unless we wished it. As a consequence we shall sleep peacefully to-night.

November 28. Mr. Kilby accompanied us on a tour of inspection

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through the house to-day. We tried to behave as grown-up people should but, to tell the truth, we acted like children with a new toy. Mr. Kilby humored us and became quite jaunty as he pointed out how he had saved money for us by using beechwood floors in the upper rooms and how he had achieved artistic effects with common brick on the outside walls of the fireplaces. The downstairs rooms are plastered now and, with favorable weather, will be dry in a week. Jane discussed her color schemes with him, and received so many compliments that she became conceited. There is no living with her to-night.

November 29. What shall we do about rugs? This is the question that is agitating us to-night. We

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have been discussing it for two hours and as a result are feeling despondent. All of our arguments serve only to convince us that there is nothing so economical as Oriental rugs; but the question is, where we are to find enough money to buy them. We have four already but they are, of course, either too small or the wrong shapes. Jane thinks that we should sell them, buy one large one for the living-room, and use rag rugs in the rest of the house. Strange that we had never considered this problem before. Acres of floor — or so it seems — over which we have walked a hundred times, and never a thought of the necessity of covering them.

November 30. Jane, the indomitable, bought four old carpets at a rummage sale to-day and sent them

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to the Industrial Bureau to be cleaned and "chewed up," as she calls it, and converted into rag rugs. I have also made a frame under her direction, and this evening she is hard at work making a hooked rug out of old stockings and mill-ends of flannel.

December

December 2. As I sat in the smoking-car of the eight forty-five this morning, after having, as usual, declined three invitations to play pitch, I looked, as I always do, out of the window until the train had passed our new house. By sliding down in my seat until my knees touch the back of the seat ahead, I can just catch a glimpse of the house. There is a great pine tree by the water-tank that almost hides it, but under the lowest branches and through the trestle of the tank I can still see the house pretty well, as it stands on the high ground a quarter of a mile away. Ever since August, when we began to dig the foundation, I have had great satisfaction in this parting

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look, as I go to the city, and have never begun to read my paper until we have passed the tank.

This morning, as I slid up again and opened my paper, a voice at my ear inquired politely, "Will you pardon me, sir, if I ask you a somewhat personal question?"

Before replying, I glanced at the speaker and beheld a weazened little man whom I recognized as a constant traveler on the train and whom I had more than once furtively observed with some amusement, because his whiskers gave an impression of ferocity which was not supported by his stooped shoulders and pale, mild eyes.

"Not at all," I replied, "though, of course, I reserve the right not to answer it."

"Certainly," said he, moving forward into the seat beside me. "I

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have often sat behind you," he went on, "and have noticed that, whenever we came to the curve there by the water-tank, you — er — "

"I had no idea I was observed," I put in, smiling, as he hesitated, "but I do not mind in the least telling you that I do that in order to look at a house I am building. I suppose it's very childish, but — "

"Oh, not at all, not at all! And you'll pardon my curiosity? Do you know, I had worked it all out in my mind that the posture you assumed was your method of bracing yourself in case an accident might occur on the curve; and, being of a scientific bent, I have speculated much as to the — er — *raison d'être* of your — ahem — *modus operandi*. But I am also a man of sentiment and can

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sympathize with your impulse to look at your house daily from the train. A house, my dear sir, especially one which one owns and has built for one's self, gives one a sense of stability, of permanency, as it were, beyond anything in the world. I envy you, — I do indeed."

I was naturally touched. We fell to discussing the new house, concerning which he gave me many suggestions and much good advice, and he parted from me in the city with expressions of esteem and with a promise to look out for me on the train next morning. It seems to me fairly obvious that he is a college professor.

December 3. My new friend did look out for me this morning. He sold me a copy of the *Busy Man's Cyclopædia of Universal Information*,

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in twenty-five volumes. Just how he managed to do this I have been wondering ever since.

December 4. I learned to-day that Charlie Waterman bought a copy of the *Busy Man's Cyclopædia* on the train last week. I have n't told Jane of my purchase, because I cannot see just where it will fit into the budget. Charlie has n't told Margaret, either, and for the same reason.

December 5. The *Cyclopædia* came to-day, in five large wooden boxes, while we were moving. We are moving all the time now, and shall be until Christmas. I had always supposed that moving our goods and chattels a quarter of a mile would consist merely of loading them into one or two small vans, carting them down the road, and putting them in

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their places in the new house; but it is not like that at all.

The trouble is that Jane is determined to clean this house from top to bottom before she leaves it. I have pointed out that it was dirty



The Cyclopædia came to-day in five large wooden boxes

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enough when we moved in and that it would serve the landlady right to leave it as we found it; but she says that she'll not have it said of her that she is that kind of housekeeper. And so she and Mandy and Jim Grady are spending their days rolling furniture from room to room, taking down pictures, rolling up rugs, covering stuffed chairs with newspapers, and scrubbing walls and floors.

When I used the term "moving" above, then, it was in a Pickwickian sense, for we have not as yet moved anything to the other house. That will of course have to be cleaned too, and that is why we are beginning to move so soon. Bub has dug a hole under the front porch and appears only at meals. I envy him, because I have to write on the washtubs in the kitchen, sitting on a high stool.

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It bruises one's knees. I wish the *Cyclopædia* had not chosen just this moment to arrive.

December 7. The worst has happened. The plumbers have struck, and the furnace men are sympathizing with them. The furnace men are not striking as yet, but they are so filled with sympathy that they cannot do any work until they get the better of their feelings. The consequence is that our front lawn continues to be covered with radiators and bathtubs. There is also an immense quantity of waterpipe in the living-room and there are lengths of galvanized pipe sticking out of the cellar windows. As for the furnace, that is lying about everywhere in sections. So far as I can see, these are likely to be permanent ornaments.

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December 10. The plumbers are holding meetings every day and the furnace men are issuing daily bulletins. The employers, also, published a long address to the public in the *Town Chronicle* to-night. All three parties are bitingly sarcastic and all three seem to be entirely in the right. Meanwhile, because of the warm weather and the rains, my bathtubs and radiators are slowly sinking into the ground.

December 11. At eight o'clock this morning all parties agreed that the strike would probably last six weeks. At ten o'clock the strike ended; why, nobody seems to know. At one o'clock, two men appeared at the new house and removed the galvanized piping from the cellar windows. Then they went home. Upon inves-

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tigation, I discovered that they had laid it gently upon the cellar floor.

December 15. All goes well. The radiators are in place, the gas men and the electricians have finished their work, and the plumbing is proceeding rapidly. Jane and Mandy have begun their cleaning. With luck, we shall eat our Christmas dinner in the new house after all.

December 22. I ordered a fourteen-pound turkey to-day.

December 23. We were to have moved to-day, but the mover did not come. Jane and I made ten trips with the car, carrying glass-ware, crockery, and pictures.

December 24. At last we are in the new house, but after what a day! Two of the mover's men began to celebrate Christmas the day before

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yesterday; he arrived short-handed. So determined were we to move, however, that we all fell to and helped. I am only semiconscious. Ring out, wild bells, all you care to: you'll not wake me to-night!

Christmas Day. And I have lumbago! It must have been that bureau of which I held the left hind leg when it got stuck in the turn of the stairs. And I have had no sympathy whatever. I lay on the davenport and suffered, while Charlie and Margaret Waterman and Phyllis Raymond, who came to help us eat the turkey, made ribald remarks about me.

It was a wild scene for a Christmas dinner, with furniture, rugs, books, pictures, boxes, and barrels lying about pell-mell on bare floors, and the head of the house reclining half

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in and half out of the dining-room; and yet never have we had a more hilarious meal, for we were in the new house. It was an event that we had looked forward to for months and, though we had not pictured it thus, we thought of nothing except that at last we really were here.

December 31. It is astonishing how quickly one settles down to a new way of life. A week ago it seemed impossible that we should ever be to rights; and yet here we are already growing as accustomed to this house as if we had never lived anywhere else. Jane is already thinking up new wrinkles, the latest being blue-checked gingham curtains at the kitchen windows. As I passed the old house to-day, I saw a new family moving in, I heard them laughing.

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“Alas! regardless of their doom,”
thought I,

“The [simple] victims play;
No sense have they of ills to come,
Nor care beyond to-day.”

For I was thinking of that house in January, and of the peculiarities of its plumbing and of its heating system. Ah, well! That's all over now. I only hope that we shall be as happy the coming year as we were that last, despite the plumbing and the lack of heat!



