

CONDUCTING A GREAT HOTEL  
 By John Gilmer Speed  
 DRAWINGS BY W. LOUIS SONNTAG, JR.



MORE than fifty thousand persons are lodged and fed in the great hotels of the better class in New York City every night. Of these twenty-five thousand are strangers, and, therefore, merely transient visitors, ten thousand are regular boarders, and another ten thousand are servants and other employees. The railroad and other transportation companies carry to New York every

day one hundred thousand persons, other than those who live in the suburbs, and those who come in merely for the hotel in the front rank always, and this fact is mentioned again, and dwelt upon, because maintenance is the most important feature of hotel economy. The wear and tear on hotel fixtures and furnishings is enormous, and so soon as the managers let these begin to get shabby and out of order then the hotel is sure to start on the downward road. The writer had some slight idea of this sort before he made the investigation that has resulted in this article, but he was astonished to find how ample and precise were the provisions against the ravages of time. Beneath the street floor, given over to corridors, offices, reading-rooms, and so on, there is a vast basement divided into not less than fifty compartments, and in these the work that is needed



SCRUBBERS' EARLY-MORNING INVASION OF THE HOTEL CORRIDORS

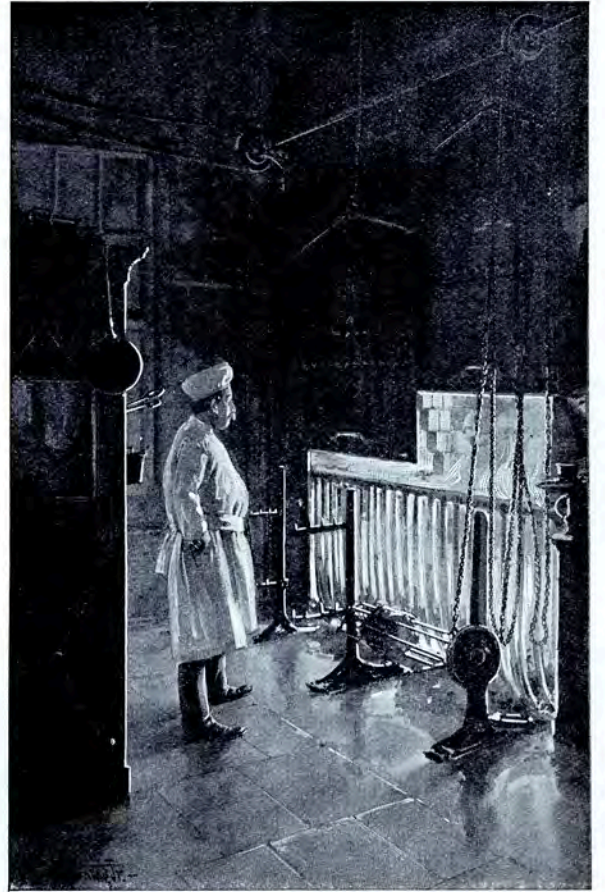


THE EXPERT LACE MENDER

day. The excess over the twenty-five thousand noted as stopping at first-class hotels are distributed among the cheaper hotels, the lodging and the boarding houses, of which there are so many that an observant person can find and point out block after block made up almost entirely of these semi-public places of shelter and refectation. To lodge, and to feed, and generally to care for such great numbers of people is a problem of importance and interest. Every one who has sojourned at a hotel has seen something of how this problem is solved, but few are acquainted with the real facts. To know these the domestic economy must be exposed.

The casual person going into a hotel might fancy that all the skillful work of direction was done in the office that is in view from the public corridor. But this is not so at all. The office is merely a place of records—a kind of bank and clearing-house—the skillful work of the experts being done out of sight entirely.

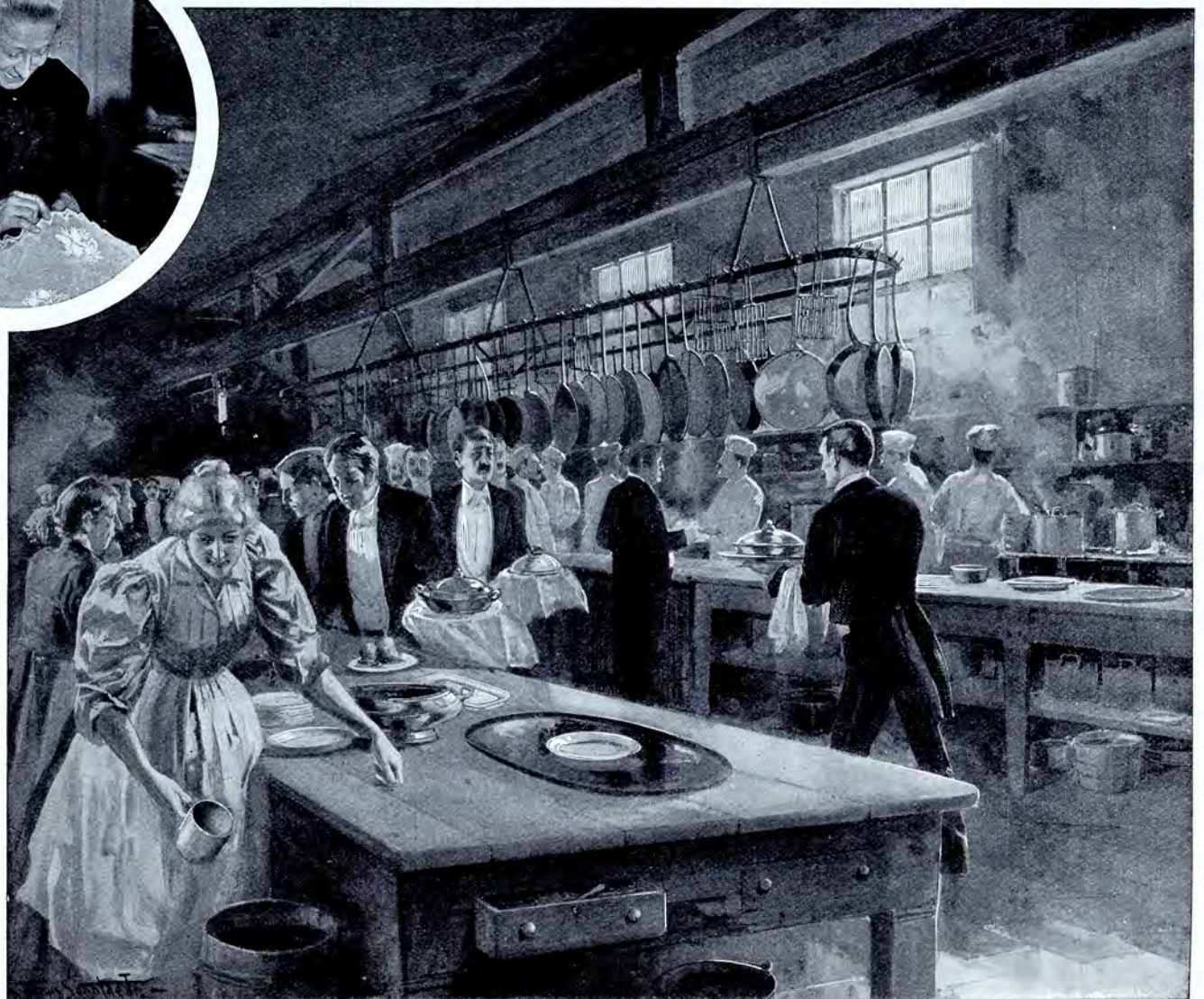
SO as to give some idea of the internal economy of a great hotel the writer recently paid a few visits to the Fifth Avenue Hotel in New York City, a hotel which has become, on account of its long prominence, a kind of national institution. This prominence could not, of course, have been maintained for more than thirty years if the managers had not been both skillful and progressive. They have kept the house always in the first rank, notwithstanding the fact that many other much finer places have been built from time to time, and in the face of the fact that the better class of the traveling public demands much better service than could have been given at any hotel a score of years ago. But the managers of this hostelry have maintained



WHERE THE MEATS AND FOWLS ARE COOKED

to keep the hotel always in smooth running order never entirely ceases from year's end to year's end, and among the craftsmen occupied are representatives of nearly every trade that has ever been learned, with here and there an ingenious fellow who can do anything that has ever been heard of, and when occasion requires invent something to meet an unprecedented demand.

NOW these men and women have to be kept profitably employed, and it is necessary that their work shall be supplied to them constantly, and in such a manner that it can be laid aside in cases of emergency. This requirement of the hotel repair shops is met by keeping in stock a large supply of furniture, carpets and curtains, and what not, so that when any are taken away for repairs substitutes are always ready. Some part of a chair is broken, the arm of a sofa gets loose, the leg of a bedstead is damaged, a mattress gets torn, and so on, and so on. Now these are casualties which every housekeeper has to contend with. I need not say in how many ways the housewives meet these difficulties, nor how much they deplore the carelessness which causes them. In a hotel, one that is well conducted, they are expected and counted on, and, therefore, anticipated, for travelers and hotel guests are frequently reckless in their carelessness, and very vandals of destructiveness. Frequent inspections and immediate reports to higher authorities, and the instant sending of any damaged article to the repair shops is the only method



THE HOTEL KITCHEN, WHILE DINNER IS BEING SERVED



by which headway can be made against the destructive forces which are also always at work. The chambermaid sees each room in her section every day at least twice, the assistant housekeeper sees every room in her division twice every week, the housekeeper sees every room once every week. So here is a system of inspection that is well nigh perfect, for these women not only look to see that everything is right, but they look specially to see if anything is wrong. And when anything is wrong that thing is made right at once; the inspector does not merely make a note of something that needs attention, but the thing that needs to be done is done instantly. The writer has never seen another instance that so forcibly as this proved the truth of the homely old adage that "a stitch in time saves nine."

IN these workshops alluded to there are cabinetmakers, painters, upholsterers, machinists, plumbers and gas-fitters, and so on. The mattresses are all made in the house, and when one gets in the least out of order it is at once sent for repair. So, also, the seats of upholstered chairs and sofas are overhauled; and the stock on hand of damasks and trimmings for such uses would suffice for a large store. And so, also, with carpets, and rugs, and curtains. Great supplies of these are kept in stock, but they are not retained after the evidences of wear are plain to be seen. Lace curtains when washed always need to be gone over by an accomplished needlewoman, and at this work in this special hotel an old lady with a gentle face and nimble fingers is kept employed all the year round. In an ordinary house, I am told, lace curtains are washed only about twice a year. But in a hotel the life of a clean curtain is very much shorter, and on an average a lace curtain does not stay up longer than one month. As every window is supplied with lace this accomplished lace mender looks over and repairs about ten thousand pairs every year. It used to take three or four women to do the work now performed by one, whose skill and systematic method of working enable her to do such a wonderful quantity of repairing. She could probably in the same way and time darn all the stockings and socks worn in the hotel. And if this were done it would not be much more remarkable than some of the other things that are done seem at the first glance or first hearing. For instance, there is a little army of chambermaids to look after the rooms of the guests. But these women do not clean their own rooms nor make their own beds, there being special chambermaids for the floor on which the servants sleep. This matter of providing apartments and feeding the servants of a hotel is most important, for good and abundant food and comfortable sleeping quarters count in with the monthly wage as part of the compensation, and as these things are good or bad it is easy or difficult to get and to retain competent, trustworthy and self-respecting servants. These people are not fed in a haphazard way, nor from the leavings from the main dining-room and the refuse of the kitchen, but they have meals at regular hours specially cooked for them and specially served. The variety is not as great as at the guests' table, nor is the service as dainty, but the food is the same in quantity and quality. This means a very great deal when it happens that there are five hundred servants employed, as is the case at the Fifth Avenue Hotel when it is entertaining its full complement of five hundred guests—a servant for each guest. Chambermaids in a first-class hotel do not have a hard time and they are well paid for their work. Good food and good lodging count for a great deal. Then they receive wages of twelve dollars per month. The tips from guests equal, on the average, twelve dollars more. The hours begin at six in the morning and end at six in the evening, each one having four nights of each week to herself, free from work or care.

THE laundry is also an immense department and has many interesting features. It is divided into sections—one for table linen and bed linen, one for kitchen aprons and cloths, one for servants' clothes, one for guests' clothes. In the technical language of the hotel laundry the guests' clothes laundered are called "bundle washings"—this, simply because they come to the laundry in bundles and each bundle is given a distinguishing mark. Because the things here laundered have to be dried in the dark a chemical bleach is necessary, but probably this is not in the least peculiar so far as work of this kind in the large cities is concerned. The bed linen in constant use is for four hundred and seventy beds, and four times that much is kept in reserve at all times. Something like one thousand napkins are used every day and fully five thousand are kept in stock. Two thousand towels are in daily use and ten thousand are kept on hand. Napkins and table-cloths only being used once and then washed wear out very rapidly, and they also disappear in a way so mysterious that no mind given to the matter has so far been shrewd enough to determine whither they go. As to the towels, that is another matter, for every now and then a keen-eyed chambermaid will detect a missing towel or two in the unclosed bag of a departing traveler. The purloining of towels by hotel guests is a very old story, but it was evidently still full of interest to the housekeeper at the Fifth Avenue Hotel, who said to the writer that the people who do it are so evidently respectable that it is not possible that they realize that in appropriating the hotel towels they are stealing. It is likely that in taking out a hotel towel from his bag when he reaches home a returned traveler may recall all that he saw lying around loose in his sojourning place and inviting appropriation, and, like Lord Clive in his return from India, rich with booty, marvel at his own moderation. At this hotel the towel appropriators have never been followed up even when their addresses were known, but it is only a delayed intention to do so. And this was about the only instance of executive delay that I learned of in the establishment.

BUT to return from this little digression to the constant and increasing effort to keep clean and to keep in order. In a well-administered hotel we see that all is well without having the machinery obtruded upon our notice. When the stillness of night has settled upon the house, and all save stray travelers and belated revelers are in bed and asleep, the cleaning and burnishing up begins. This is at three o'clock in the morning, when a force of fifteen scrubbers, and ten dusters and sweepers are put to work. The halls and stairways are swept and dusted, and the uncovered floors are scrubbed and polished. This work is all finished by six o'clock in the morning, so that the very earliest risers find that all has been made nice and clean for the new day. The linen from the laundry having been delivered the evening before, when the rooms are vacated and ready to be made up, there is

an abundant supply of clean sheets and pillow-cases, which, of course, are put on fresh for each new occupant however short the stay of the departing guest had been. It was interesting to learn that not all of the bed linen was really linen. Much of it is cotton, as there is a growing preference for cotton over linen sheets, many persons dreading the chill of the linen, and many others being admonished by their physicians that cotton is more conducive to health. Ten years ago no cotton sheeting was used in this hotel; now it is not supplied except when asked for, but the demand is so great that in compliance with requests, about three beds out of ten are furnished with it. There is a central linen-room in charge of the head laundress, but each chambermaid has her own closet, which is replenished day by day as she receives from the laundry the exact number of pieces that she sends to the wash. The discipline is of the character we are in the habit of calling military, and the exact placing of responsibility, both in details and in general, in this great house-cleaning department is as exact as possible. Without this manner and method no mere love of order and cleanliness would avail much. The work to be done is so vast and comprehensive that it must be regulated by system, and performed with an intelligent energy which counts no trouble too great and no detail too small. With such efforts even a large hotel after many years of hard and constant usage can be kept as fresh as it was when its doors were first opened and the affable clerk bowed over the counter to the first guest who registered in the book of arrivals.

BUT we have seen only a half of the domestic economy of this great hotel, where something like five hundred guests take three meals each day, and where all of them may have four if they so choose. To provision such an establishment requires a little more foresight and care than a mere daily amble through a market, and the purchasing of what happens to strike the fancy of the family provider. The markets of a great city are open long before the ordinary city resident has wakened from the night's sleep. It is at such early hours that the marketing is done for the large hotels. From the Fifth Avenue one of the proprietors goes to Fulton and to Washington markets every morning except Sundays. It would be possible, no doubt, to do this marketing now and then by messenger, but it is evidently much safer and more satisfactory to keep in as close touch as possible with the dealers, and have under constant observation the supplies that are displayed on the stands. In this way the hotel proprietor runs little risk of failing to get the best that is to be had, and he also reduces to the minimum the chance of not securing the most advantageous prices. The steward, who has immediate charge of all provisions, keeps a market book, and each morning the proprietor who does the marketing is supplied with a list of what is needed. When he goes his rounds he is guided quite strictly by this list in the purchase of fish, and perishable fruits and vegetables, but he has great leeway as to what meat he buys each day, for this hotel—and it is the case with all the large hotels—has a large cold-storage room for meat, and in it there is always enough to last for three weeks. Indeed, the purchases of beef and mutton are of what is called "green meat," and this is always hung a fortnight or so before it is considered to be in proper condition for cooking. The marketer for the Fifth Avenue Hotel gets back at about half-past seven, and brings with him pretty nearly all the fish that are used that morning for breakfast, the most of which the day before were uncaptured denizens of their native elements. The guests, therefore, can have genuine fresh fish for breakfast if they wish it.

BUT this is by no means the first work that has been done that day toward getting breakfast ready. The bakers go on duty at twelve o'clock at night, so that hot rolls may be ready at seven o'clock. At five in the morning the steward is in his office, and before him is a busy hour of preparation of the market book. At six the cooks and their helpers appear and begin preparations for breakfast. Before seven the waiters begin coming in, and by eight o'clock everything is in full blast. And so, in the lower regions, it continues till twelve o'clock at night, with little respites from eleven to one in the morning, and from half-past three to half-past five in the afternoon, and again from half-past eight to ten in the evening. These little respites are used by the scrubbers and cleaners, who not only wash the dishes and glasses and cooking utensils but scrub everything in sight three or four times a day. But such care is needed, for every one knows that cooking is apt to be very dirty work even when only one cook is engaged in the operation. In the kitchen here, exclusive of the bakery and pastry adjuncts, there are twelve men and four women cooks at work. It is interesting to note that the women are employed to cook the vegetables because they are more careful in cleaning them than men, and appear to have a natural antipathy for putting them in the pot together with the native soil that came to and from the markets. Preparing vegetables for a great hotel is not a small task, as this hotel uses four barrels of potatoes every day, and when spinach is on the bill-of-fare a barrel is required. To supply this hotel with potatoes the entire product of a fertile field of forty acres would be needed. Cranberry sauce is made regularly twice a week, and on each occasion a half barrel of cranberries is used. For Thanksgiving Day a whole barrel of cranberries was required.

THE roasting of meats is a great operation in a large establishment where six roasts of beef of seven ribs each are in process of cooking at one time. Then the cook whose business it is to baste these roasts has to be as nimble as a jumping-jack, and he needs to keep moving, for if he stood long in one place the glowing furnace fire would toast him as he stood in his boots. On Thanksgiving Day two hundred turkeys were cooked, for it was quite correctly inferred that every one would dine off the national domestic bird that day. For roasting turkeys there is in front of the grates a revolving shaft, on which as many turkeys as may be required are impaled after they have been stuffed. As this shaft revolves quite slowly the turkeys are cooked and the drippings fall into a pan beneath, and are used for basting and for gravy. The range takes up all one side of the meat kitchen, and further along than the roasting sections are the places for broiling and frying. Where so many things need to be done at once, and everything must be done in a hurry, one would expect to see great confusion. And the first glance of a hotel kitchen, say at six-thirty o'clock in the evening, when dinner is at its height, gives this impression. But if the visitor will wait a little until a better notion of what is going on is obtained

it will be seen that this kitchen is a very orderly kind of chaos, and that every one in it knows exactly what is the business in hand, and how best to get through with it quickly. The head cook or *chef* has arranged all of the work before each meal, having given special attention to the made dishes which require the touch of a master hand, and now during its progress he gives a watchful supervision. To him all the cooks are responsible; he reports, in turn, to the steward, and the steward to the proprietors. In this department there is the strictest discipline and a precise division of responsibility. This system extends to the waiters, who are also in the steward's department, but directly under the head waiter and his two assistants. When we stop at hotels we see some of the work of the waiters, but probably not the most important and difficult part. That is done in the kitchen, where the waiter has to get exactly what the taste of the guest he is serving requires. Now when a waiter goes to the kitchen with four orders, each different, and when each guest has made some special specification—as for the second joint of a turkey or for the outside piece of a roast of beef, and so on—very close attention is necessary on his part or he will return to the dining-room with everything mixed up, and provoke the guest at the worst possible time, for when a man is hungry his temper is apt to be short, and mere trifles are likely to seem of very great importance. The difficulties in the way of becoming an accomplished hotel waiter are very great, but when they have been overcome a man is sure of steady employment and good wages until he has become disabled by age. There are waiters in the Fifth Avenue Hotel who have worked there steadily for a quarter of a century.

AMERICANS are great coffee-drinkers, and good coffee must be had at every hotel that finds favor. I was curious to learn how the great quantities were kept constantly on hand, and, at the same time, always fresh. The coffee-pot is a huge affair in which several gallons could be made at once. It is upon the French plan, and boiling water is poured over finely-ground, freshly-parched coffee. One man is kept making coffee all the time. He makes it in six-quart quantities, using for breakfast coffee six quarts of water to four pounds of coffee; for dinner coffee the water is reduced to five quarts to four pounds, and for after-dinner or black coffee to four quarts. The coffee-pot is enameled inside because this can be kept clean, which tin cannot, as the coffee eats off the tin in a little while, and then in that pot it is next to impossible to make satisfactory coffee. I have mentioned these proportions and this matter of cleanliness of the pot because good coffee is just as easy to make as bad, if the material and the utensil be right. Boiled coffee is no longer served at first-class hotels and restaurants.

There is a tremendous breakage of china and glass in the kitchen and dining-rooms, and on the wash-tables. For many years past the proprietors of the Fifth Avenue Hotel have had to spend ten thousand dollars each year in new china, made specially for the hotel in France. Three-fourths of all the china in use is thus destroyed every year. Recently a rotary washing-machine has been put in operation, and there is a hope that the breakage will be less. Before the plates and dishes go to this machine they are scraped with tolerable care. In the machine jets of hot water play upon the china and remove from it all foreign substances; then a rinsing application is given and the china is ready to be wiped dry by hand—the good, old-fashioned way common to every kitchen. This machine is always busy, for the china is washed at once after it has been used, as it is in continuous service, the supper-room not being closed till midnight, having been opened for breakfast at seven.

ONE feature of providing for hotel tables puzzles the ordinary housekeeper. How does the steward know how much of each thing to provide? For instance, he knows that there will be five hundred persons for dinner and that all of them may call for soup. Now he has on his bill-of-fare three soups. How does he know that all of the guests will not call for one kind of soup, and if he does not know does he have to provide enough of each kind to supply all? But he does know. Long experience has taught these purveyors to the public taste what percentage of guests will call for this and for that. They make a little more than this percentage calls for, and then they are on the safe side without being wasteful. Green turtle soup is the most popular with hotel diners, and when that is on the bill-of-fare an extra quantity must be provided. When a popular game, such as grouse, or partridge, or quail, or canvas-back duck, is on the bill-of-fare then the supply must be very liberal. The record shows that eight out of ten will call for canvas-back, seven out of ten for quail, six out of ten for partridge and grouse. There are four portions to a grouse, partridge and duck, and only one to a quail. There is one thing of which at dinner it is tolerably safe to say that every guest will call for—ice cream. And, therefore, this is made in great quantities—eighty quarts a day—and sometimes a new freezer or so is started after dinner has begun. Roast beef is much more popular than any other meat.

This sketch may seem to partake somewhat of the nature of an inventory, but I trust it has given a little glimpse of the hotel world behind the scenes, and that in some measure it shows the infinite pains that are taken for the comfort of travelers when they are shut off by necessity from the inestimable comforts of home.

## LITTLE SCHOOLMASTERS OF WISDOM

By William H. Hill

INSPIRATION, like death, always comes unexpectedly. Many young men of to-day need guardians rather than wives.

The sneer of a cynic and the bite of a lamb are alike harmless.

The softest thing in the world is the hand of a woman when it caresses.

Generosity often follows the possession of riches, but riches are slow in coming to the generous.

How much of sorrow would be prevented if regret could precede rather than follow a wrong deed.

It is always best to avoid controversy with two kinds of people: those who cannot understand you and those who will not.

If common-sense were sold by the yard, like ribbon, there would be found many who did not possess enough sense to buy it with judgment.