

THE ART OF PURIFYING HOUSES.



IT is much to be regretted that the classes of society which should be an example of intelligence to the less educated, understand and study so little the cleansing and washing of their dwellings. Without dipping too deeply into the vexed waters of Sanitary Reform, we may in a short article bring a few facts and suggestions to the minds and memories of our readers that may prove useful.

The art of washing one's house includes many methods of cleansing independent

of soap and water. The very atmosphere of it requires washing, by streams of fresh air being continually admitted to sweep away impure gases which would otherwise congregate, and engender disease. The expression of "a healthy mind in a healthy body" can hardly be effectually fulfilled unless the healthy body is in a healthy house.

All great reforms have, in times past and present, always run to extremes in their first developments, and thus we see in sanitary matters that the use of disinfectants has become almost an abuse. So many people who notice an offensive drain-odour in their houses are quite satisfied that, having put down the usual powders and disinfecting fluids, they have cured the evil. We cannot too strongly and forcibly bring to the notice of all intelligent persons, that *it is worse than useless to use one disagreeable odour to cover up another, with the idea of curing it*—you do not cure the evil, you but ignore it—and for all time it should be a proverb, applied morally, socially, politically, and, last but not least, physically, that *no evil is ever cured by being ignored*.

Therefore do not place carbolic powder boxes, nor sprinkle chloride of lime, &c., where your drain openings exist, *merely* to distract your nose's attention from the sewer gas which is issuing from some leaking pipe or choked trap—by so doing you but ignore nature's warning that, like the premonitory smoke and rumblings of a volcano, advises you of the eruption of disease to come.

Remember, first of all, that fresh air and fresh water are the supreme king and queen of disinfectants; these being pure and bountifully used, you will not need to employ chemicals, except in the case of infectious and contagious illnesses.

To insure the air-washing or ventilation of your house, look to the state of your ventilators, if you have

any, that they are kept in repair and perfect working order. If unprovided with these inventions, make your own by keeping your windows opened both top and bottom, if only the width of an inch, day and night.

People who sleep with their doors and windows tightly shut, wonder why they get up in the morning feeling weary and unrefreshed, as if they needed more sleep, or had sat up late the night before. The explanation is very simple. They have been breathing air vitiated with the organic matter they throw off from their lungs during their sleep, and are to a certain extent poisoned.

The poor are very slow to believe this; they think you will kill them with cold if you propose to open a window; but just place a saucer of diluted Condry's fluid in the shut-up room for one night, and then show them the scum of organic matter with which it is covered in the morning, absorbed from air vitiated by the breath of even only one person, and they will be surprised.

Teach them that fresh air must never mean a draught; that if the cold or weather is too severe to have their bed-room window open and the door shut, then *faute de mieux* they must open the door; but the window, if possible, is always better, as rooms ventilated from the house have in the air frequently a certain amount of sewer gas.

We turn now to the other great necessary of health—water—as important to the well-being of the house as of the individual. Supposing that your supply is good, take care that the tap from which you draw your drinking-water is the nearest to the main, so that it comes straight in from the street, and is always fresh. Allow no one in the house to drink from any other tap, as water-pipes are often laid near those from which sewage gas can arise, and in any case contain water which has either stood in a cistern or remained in them for some time, and is therefore unwholesome. Few people realise that water "goes bad" by keeping, as certainly as milk does. Never drink water which has stood uncovered in a closed or sleeping room all night; it is thoroughly impure.

Filters are, of course, the best means of securing the purity of water, but as all cannot afford them, we would suggest to the great water companies supplying large towns, that in the same way as the parochial authorities and gas companies undertake the cleansing of dust-bins and care of gas metres, they should supply and supervise a fixed filter, which ought to be attached to the water-works of every house, and placed on the principal pipe coming in from the main. The water company should have this in their special charge, changing the filtering apparatus and cleansing the filter at stated times, so that in addition to the purification we are assured the water gets before leaving the great reservoirs, every house might have its own filter. This would prevent any chance, how-

ever remote, of the spread of fatal disease by means of the water supply. Unfortunately, however, it is *in* the house that water generally becomes impure. It does not do to wait for inspectors to come and detect the errors of your drains. You must look about for yourself, and if you find any place or places where there is a bad smell, do not only put down disinfectants (which are very useful in their way), but never rest till you have hunted down and unearthed it.

Look to your cisterns, and have them cleaned out (and scrubbed when not made of lead) at frequent and stated times, so that soot and dirt shall not collect in them and poison your water. See that all sinks and traps to waste water pipes are kept thoroughly free from any kind of impurities, such as hair, tea-leaves, grease; nay, go even further, and discover whether your waste pipes have been blocked by extraneous matter, which often happens, as there are few servants who do not look upon them as metal boa-constrictors, capable of digesting anything. Of course the mischief may be even deeper down, quite in the drains, but do not let this daunt you, nor hesitate to have the flags of your kitchen or yard taken up, and the evil thoroughly investigated.

It has been suggested that a skilled, intelligent plumber should be employed by the authorities to occasionally go the round of every house, taking special and personal charge of the sanitary matters connected therewith. This would greatly relieve householders, who, with the best desire, rarely understand drainage and sanitary systems enough to detect a flaw quickly. The best plumbers, too, have yet much to learn; but, as a body, they are acquiring the necessary knowledge as quickly as can be expected. After this long chat about air and water, we come at last to house-scrubbing and washing.

All yards, kitchens, and passages in the basement should be whitewashed at least twice a year, and the paint well cleaned or renewed at intervals. If a room is to be cleaned as it should be, the floor must be scrubbed, the paint washed, and the walls brushed with a strong feather-broom. For scrubbing, the servant should have a pail of clean hot water, in which some soda has been melted, a new piece of house-flannel, and a clean scrubbing-brush—you can never make anything clean with dirty implements. Should the floor not be very dirty, ordinary soap rubbed on the brush will be sufficient; but if a great cleaning is required, use soft-soap on the brush instead. Take the flannel to rinse off the soap, wringing it each time to dry the floor. The great secret of good floor-washing is never to do the whole room with the same water, but change it two or three times in a small room, and more frequently in a large one. Servants are very difficult to impress with the necessity of this, as they like to make the same water, as well as other things, serve many purposes. Soft-soap is apt to leave an offensively "washy" smell afterwards sometimes; this will soon pass if the windows are opened and a free current of air admitted. To wash paint, which is done best with very little soda in the water, the servant should be careful to begin at the bottom of the door or wall, &c., as any little streams that run

down make none of the marks on a wet surface that they do on a dry one. Take a clean chamois leather, wrung out in fresh water, to dry it.

We mentioned in a previous article how important it is to keep bathing implements clean; the same rule applies to those of house-washing, on which too much care cannot be bestowed. Pails should be always scalded every morning, put out in the air, and scoured with salt and sand, or salt and turpentine, followed by a copious rinsing once a week, especially toilet pails. Never allow a pail to be used for any other purpose than that for which it is intended. Keep each to its own special use. The scrubbing-brush too needs attention, and unless kept clean will smell. Have it well rinsed, and all hair and pieces of flannel fluff picked out of it, every time after using. Cloths and washing-flannels must be thoroughly rinsed in separate waters, and hung out in the open air to dry. Never permit them to be mixed together at any time, nor the same cloth or flannel to be used for two different purposes—for instance, the flannel (or water) that is used for your whitened hall-door steps, must not be employed to wash the oil-cloth in the hall; yet many a careless servant will do this, the result being that the oil-cloth is covered with a visible coat of whitening, which effectually dulls its lustre.

Thus far we have but mentioned the simplest rules and means of common house-cleaning and washing: rules which to disobey will bring their own punishment, and means which are within the power of every one. Illness makes us, however, still more on our guard, for life depends often on the care we take at such times, and this is not always realised. If a room has to be washed during illness it should be done with carbolic soap, chloride of lime, or a strong solution of copperas in the water. Place small basins of Condy's fluid, diluted according to given directions, about the sick-chamber, and put some in every vessel that has to remain in the room. If the air is offensive, some aromatic vinegar, or stalks of dried lavender burned on hot cinders, and wafted around, will sweeten it; but it is better to admit fresh air if possible. Clothes which have to be removed from a room where a contagious or infectious complaint exists, must be either sprinkled with disinfectants before being sent to the wash (and due notice must *always* be given to the laundress) or taken to the public fumigatories, and thoroughly disinfected. The same treatment must be pursued with all household linen and bedding after an illness; every bed and pillow used by invalids should be opened, the cover washed in disinfectant water, and the feathers, hair, or wool-stuffing baked at the fumigatories; in some cases it is even advisable to burn and entirely destroy them, but of this the sanitary officers are the best judges.

So much is, after all, in our own power; and if every one, in addition to a little care and watchfulness, would but make a conscientious duty of cleanliness in everything, we are certain that we should seldom be shocked, terrified, and bereaved by the scourge of those many great and infectious epidemics which now live in our midst.

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