

How a tenant may keep his cottage healthy and comfortable / by J. Corbett.

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HOW A TENANT MAY KEEP HIS COTTAGE HEALTHY AND COMFORTABLE.

BY J. CORBETT,

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THAT'S the landlord's business! If I pay my rent I've done my share, and he must keep it 'healthy and comfortable,' or I'll soon find another." Well, that is what most of us think about it; but this idea is often carried too far, and a sensible tenant will do many things for his own comfort in his cottage, just as if the place was entirely his own.

Some of the things I have to recommend to you are such as a liberal and judicious landlord might do for his tenants, but which any tenant would be wise in doing for himself, by the rule, "If you want a thing doing, do it yourself;" but most of my hints will be about things that come entirely within the tenant's care, and specially within the housewife's care.

I take it for granted that the landlord maintains the house properly, with a sound roof and walls, reasonably close-fitting doors and windows, smooth and dry floors, the usual kitchen-range and slopstone, reasonable yard accommodation, and a pure water supply. Most of the cottages within ten miles of Manchester are provided with these essentials of health, and therefore we have great advantages over the tenants of many other parts of the country, which would enable us, by proper care, to maintain good health, even though we have more than our share of soot and dust in the air, and less than our share of sunshine.

There are many cottages (I have had the pleasure of visiting several) in which the good-wife practices nearly all the health and

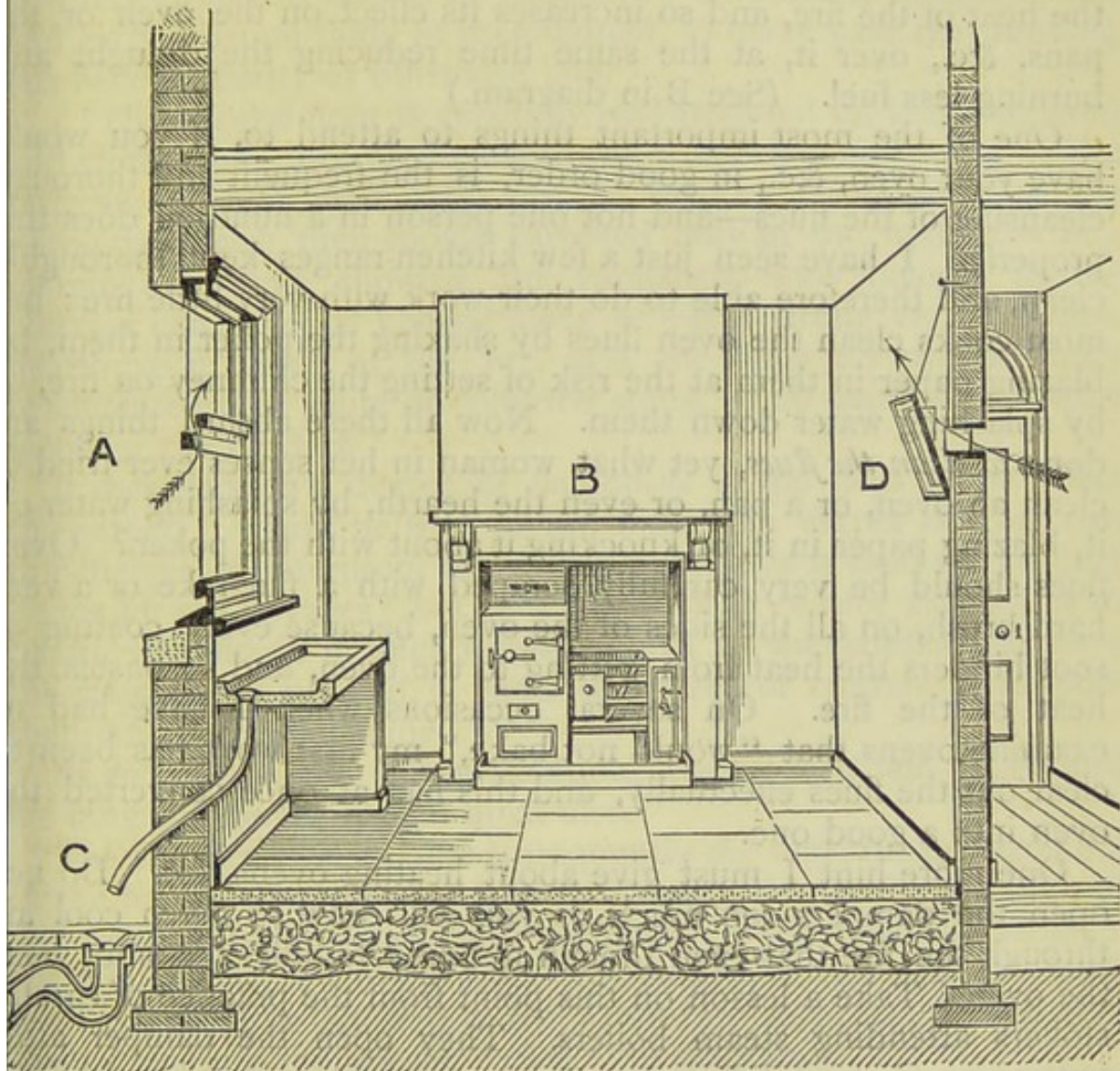
comfort giving arts to which I shall call your attention. So let it be clearly understood between us that I don't presume to propose many new ideas, but rather to gather together the many practical hints that have been given me, from time to time, in various ways.

Let us take for example a cottage or small house, one of a row, with a small front parlour, a roomy kitchen, a scullery, and yard, &c. The kitchen will be the usual dwelling-room, so our first attention must be given to it. It has, we will suppose, (1) a sash window, (2) an open fire-range, oven, and side boiler, (3) some cupboards, and (4) a flagged floor.

1. The sash window should be widely opened for a while each day, and the doors also opened, so as to give the house a good blow through, which will clear away all smoky or foul air lurking in the corners and behind the furniture. When a room has been used for cooking, washing, or other such work, nothing so readily and completely freshens it and makes it pleasant for one's dinner or tea as to give it a thorough blow through for a few minutes. Even in winter this is pleasant, for the room soon gets warm again after the doors are shut, because its walls and floors, &c., are all warm, and they assist in warming the fresh air in it. The sash window also forms the most convenient inlet for fresh air while the room is in use, sometimes by opening the top part of the window; but in cold weather it is best to raise the lower part of the window a little, so as to let air in upwards at the meeting bars and close the opening below it by a slip of wood, or by one of those sash-bags so often misplaced on the window. (See A in diagram.)

2. The fireplace, oven, and boiler call for very special attention, as on them depends to some extent the good or bad cooking, and also the quantity of coal used. I have seen very few good, near economical cooking-ranges in cottages, and very many bad ones, but I never saw one so bad that it could not be made tolerably good by a little contrivance and care. Nearly all cottage fireplaces have quite too large a fire space, and therefore burn too much fuel, but they can be easily improved by fitting two or three firebricks into the side opposite the oven. These bricks should be set sloping so as to make the fire space narrower at the bottom than at the top, then when you want a very small fire it will be kept close to the oven ready to heat it, and when you want a large fire, to boil two pans at once, the top width of the fire space will be ample for the purpose. The side boiler would be cooled by thus narrowing the fire, and you would have to use a pan or kettle for hot water.

SECTION OF A COTTAGE KITCHEN.



SHOWING—

- A.—Air inlet by sash window, with draught turned up over head; the opening below sash closed by a fillet of wood.
- B.—Kitchen-range, with fire space reduced by sloping brickwork, and "oven heater" hung on bars.
- C.—Slopstone waste-pipe safely arranged.
- D.—Air inlet behind a picture.

Some boilers are L shaped, and go behind the fire ; such ones would not be much affected. Another very good means of economising fuel is by using a plate of iron called an "oven heater," to hang on the bars and cover part of the fire front. This confines the heat of the fire, and so increases its effect on the oven or the pans, &c., over it, at the same time reducing the draught and burning less fuel. (See B in diagram.)

One of the most important things to attend to, if you would have your oven, &c., in good order, is the frequent and thorough cleansing of the flues—and not one person in a hundred does this properly. I have seen just a few kitchen-ranges kept thoroughly clean, and therefore able to do their work with very little fire ; but most cooks clean the oven flues by shaking the poker in them, by blazing paper in them at the risk of setting the chimney on fire, or by splashing water down them. Now all these absurd things are done *to clean the flues*, yet what woman in her senses ever tried to clean an oven, or a pan, or even the hearth, by splashing water on it, blazing paper in it, or knocking it about with the poker? Oven flues should be very carefully scraped with a flue-rake or a very hard brush, on all the sides of the oven, because every coating of soot hinders the heat from getting to the oven, and so wastes the heat of the fire. On several occasions when I have had to examine ovens that "would not bake," my first work has been to clear out the flues effectually, and this has at once converted the oven into a good one.

One more hint I must give about heating ovens, &c. Do not open the dampers too much or you will draw so much cool air through the fire that even though it burns rapidly it cannot heat the oven. Take a lesson on this point from the practice of careful stokers attending steam boilers. They open the damper after putting on fresh coal, but as soon as the fire has got red and bright they nearly close the damper, making the most economical use of the intense heat of the clear fire, and thereby making it last a long time before needing fresh coal, and a careful housewife would do the same with her kitchen fire.

Both oven and side boiler should frequently be thoroughly scrubbed inside, so as to remove any soot or dirt adhering to the sides.

3. As to the cupboards, there is a well-known good rule that coffee or tea should be kept in close vessels, and not near meat or strong flavoured things, as they quickly pick up any such flavour.

By-the-by, if you happen to have some meat or game that has just a little too strong a flavour, you can cure it somewhat by scattering ground coffee over it, taking care to throw away the coffee, as it would be unfit for use afterwards.

Every cupboard should be completely emptied at regular times, and each separate thing in it examined, to make sure that nothing has become musty or otherwise bad.

4. The flagged floor is generally well attended to, being scoured and stoned and decorated cleverly with pipeclay, according to the taste of the housewife; and just as wealthy fashionable people now-a-days have their rooms carpeted only in the middle, with a margin all round, showing the varnished floor boards, so the cottager can have his central piece of plain strong carpet, with a hearthrug in front of the fire, and the flags all round neatly ornamented with white or coloured stone, or oil painted to imitate wood or tile borders.

If there is such a degree of dampness in the flags as to affect the carpet, it would be well to lay under the carpet one or two thicknesses of waterproof brown paper, such as is used for packing goods for sea voyages; but as a damp floor is very dangerous to health you should in such a case appeal to the landlord to have the flags taken up and a good thickness of cinders put under them and properly drained.

As to the scullery, our notes about the kitchen will apply, and we must add some special hints also.

The slopstone waste-pipe is frequently the most dangerous thing in the house, as it is often directly connected with the sewers, and so brings poisonous gases into the house. The only safe arrangement is to have it carried from the slopstone through the back wall, and there be allowed to discharge into an open grid and trap connected with the sewers. (See C in diagram.)

Remember that sewer gas is the frequent cause of typhoid fever, diphtheria, and many other diseases, so you should never endure any chance of breathing it that can be avoided; and as the slopstone-pipe is the commonest inlet for sewer gas, bringing fever, &c., into cottages, by all means take care to have it properly cut off, as just explained. The lecture by Dr. J. M. Fox, on "Defective Drainage as a Cause of Disease," just published among our "Health Lectures for the People," shows clearly the great perils we encounter from defective sewers.

The drinking water supplied by the town's water-pipes is usually of excellent quality, but it gets somewhat damaged by the lead

pipes through which it comes into our dwellings ; and water that has laid all night in lead pipes is not fit to drink, so you should make it a rule always to draw off a large basinful, or a bucketful, for washing purposes, before drawing any for the kettle or to drink.

There is one excellent use to be made of the cottage scullery that is not so common as it should be—I refer to its use as a bath-room or washing-room for the grown-up people in a cottage.

Most good housewives and mothers fully appreciate the advantages of frequent washing all over for their children ; but far too many grown-up folks utterly neglect to wash themselves, except as to hands and faces. The doctors tell us about the millions of pores, or little holes, all over our skins, each of which should be free to perspire and breathe in order that our bodies may be pure and healthy. The trainers, when they have to prepare a man or a horse for exerting his utmost power and endurance in a race, insist on frequent thorough washing with warm water, and daily rinsing with cold water. Nearly all of us know the pleasant feeling of freshness and liveliness after having a good bathe ; and yet, with all these inducements to persuade us to take the pleasure of a good washing, and with pure water supplied in unlimited quantity, most of us persist in neglecting it, and only bathe on the rarest occasions.

It has been well said that Manchester is almost compensated for its sooty and sulphurous atmosphere by its showery weather, which continually washes and purifies the air and cleanses the streets. I am sure that if every inhabitant of Manchester could be persuaded to have a bath each day that the streets of Manchester have a rain-bath, the benefit to health would be greater than anything that has yet been effected by any sanitary improvement. I believe the Corporation rule is that every street in Manchester shall be cleansed at least once a week, and the rain-storms give many extra cleansings. Now does it not seem absurd for us to have to own that we pay far more frequent attention to cleaning our streets than to cleansing our skins? Yet our skins are of far more vital importance to us, and by proper care may be kept in a continual glow of health and vigour, instead of the dry, harsh, disagreeable condition in which most of us remain.

It is no excuse to say you cannot bathe because you have no bath or bathroom. A man might as well say he cannot read because he has no reading-room, and cannot smoke because he has no smoking-room. Where there is a will there is a way, and every cottage with a scullery and a water supply has thus got a

good bathing-room all ready; and even if it is needful to bring in an extra bucket of water from a tap in the court, that is not much trouble to go to in order to have the pleasure, the benefit, the safety against disease, that a thorough good washing all over will give. So each cottage scullery should have a curtain or blind to its window and a piece of board on its floor to stand on, and then it contains all the fittings needful for a comfortable bathe.

Let us pass now from the scullery to the yard. I hope your cottage has a yard of its own, and not merely a share in a large common yard. Of course, like everything else, it should be kept clean, in order to be "healthy and comfortable," but some people's notions of cleanliness are peculiar. I have seen cottage yards which their owners declared to be quite clean and tidy, which contained rabbits or pigeons, dogs or donkeys. Now without speaking disrespectfully of these donkeys, &c., I venture to say that they tend very much to hinder a tenant from making his cottage healthy and comfortable, and therefore they should be avoided as far as possible; but if, say for business use, you must keep such animals on your premises, take especial care to remove all dirt away as frequently as possible, and use sawdust rather than straw for bedding, as it has a great power of absorbing the unhealthy emanations.

Your yard, if near Manchester, will very likely be provided with some sort of a tub-closet, and perhaps a cinder-sifter. There has been much abuse bestowed on these things, and I have seen hundreds of them misused, broken, and out of order; but still I say positively that in my opinion the municipal authorities have done more good by adopting these things and clearing away the abominable old ash-pits, than by any sanitary measure since they first supplied abundant, cheap, pure water to our dwellings.

It seems a very simple matter to throw ashes into the ash-tub, and not into the other tub; but the fact is that many tons of ashes and cinders are thus put in the wrong place, and they cause much extra trouble and expense at the towns yards, all which needless expense means needless rates to be paid in consequence of carelessness. So let each try to save trouble by throwing away their ashes properly.

There is another piece of carelessness with regard to ashes and cinders that *saves* the corporations a lot of money—that is, the common habit of throwing away good cinders instead of burning them. Enough cinders are riddled out of the ashes at the towns' yards to fire all the steam boilers required. Now if you can afford

to throw away cinders I need not object, but if you believe that "A penny saved is a penny gained," and that you want your pennies for other purposes, then I advise you to riddle your ashes and burn your cinders, by which means you may save much good fuel.

It is time now to turn to a pleasanter part of our subject—the parlour—in which we especially desire to have comfort and health in our leisure time.

This room is often smaller than the cottage kitchen, has a very low fireplace, and a three-light gas chandelier, all these things tending to make it unhealthily close, so that after half a dozen people have had their tea there, and have had the gas lit some hours, any one coming into the room from the fresh air will notice at once its offensive closeness. Now, our noses are able to taste the air we breathe, and tell us when it tastes bad, and is therefore injurious to us, just as our mouths can taste and try our food and drink. So when you wish to prove whether the air of a room is good or bad for you, just take your nose into the fresh air for a few minutes, then follow it into the room, and ask its candid opinion as to the condition of the room. If your nose says the air is sweet and pure, all right; but if it says there is a disagreeable smell of gas fumes and of spent breath, then do something to turn out the bad air and bring pure fresh air in. If you open the door or window when the room has got very warm, the cold draught will be disagreeable and possibly injurious. Prevention is better than cure, and you should have prevented the room from getting too close. For this purpose you want some means of comfortable ventilation, and as most cottage parlours are built with an air space under their floors, and an air grid into this space at the front, you can easily apply the system that we often recommend for first-class mansions, that is to have an air pipe at each end of the mantelpiece, brought straight up from below the floor, throwing a fountain of fresh air up to the ceiling, where it will spread over all the room. These pipes should be each about four feet long and three inches bore for a small room: they may be like common stove-pipes, or like roof water-pipes. If you don't like the little expense of this, which is the best plan, then you can use that already described, of opening the lower part of the sash window two or three inches, and putting a slip of wood or a sash-bag on the bottom part of the frame to close the bottom opening, letting the air enter upwards at the meeting bars by the window fastener, or you may make a hole through the parlour wall into the open

air or into the passage, at about seven feet above the floor, and hang a picture sloping in front of it to turn up the fresh air.* (See D in diagram.)

When you have arranged some such comfortable air inlet, but not till then, you might add much to the warmth of the room by spreading sheets of paper all over the floor, under your carpet, to keep out the draught between the boards. Usually this foot-starving floor draught is the chief air inlet to a parlour, and though such an inlet is healthier than none, it is incomparably inferior to those I have described. Another common air inlet that makes very disagreeable draughts is the chink below the skirting boards, which is often a quarter inch wide. This can easily be stopped by a piece of soft rope or by a thin roll of paper.

The great object in ventilating a room comfortably is to keep the air still and warm about the floor and lower part of the room; to let fresh air in at four or five feet above the floor, directing it up towards the ceiling, so that it may spread over the warm upper part of the room before coming against any one; and to remove the spent air from the room rapidly by the chimney, or by the window or other means if no fire is used.

If you burn much gas or have many people in a small room the common fireplace and chimney will not effectually remove the foul air which will collect near the ceiling. You may prove this any evening by putting a chair or a table in such a room and climbing up so that you can breathe the air close to the ceiling, and you may be surprised to find how terribly offensive and nauseous it is.

I feel some difficulty in proposing to tenants of cottages the way to effectually remove this foul air from near the ceiling, because it involves an expense of about six shillings for one of old Dr. Arnott's Exit Valves, which should be fixed into the smoke flue near the ceiling, where it would draw away the foul air into the flue. There are other such valves to be had at the ironmongers' shops, most of them very bad ones. I hope that presently a really good, cheap, exit valve may be offered to the public, but at present great care is needful in selecting one.

You may generally benefit yourself in several ways by proper attention to your gas-lights. If the jets are bad you can get good new ones for twopence each, and can screw them in with white lead or hot sealing-wax; and by properly regulating the tap you

* All these modes of ventilating were shown in the drawings and in the working model of a room, with gas-lights, &c., used at the Lecture.

can prevent their flaring up and smoking the ceiling. If the light jumps because of water in the pipes, you can sometimes find the dip in the pipe and make it right, sometimes it is in the bracket or chandelier itself; and if you cannot find it you should insist on having it remedied by a gasfitter, for a jumping light will injure any one's eyes. Avoid burning more gas than need be, not merely for economy's sake—and you should economise all the same if your landlord pays for the gas or not—but avoid excessive gas burning because it pollutes the air very seriously. You may often make one light serve instead of two for sewing or reading, by putting a conical paper shade over the glass globe, so as to reflect down the light, and by choosing a gas globe that has clear glass in its lower part.

There may be some persons present here, or my lecture when published among the "Health Lectures for the People" may be read by some, who use their kitchen as a parlour in the evening, and for their benefit I will describe a kitchen-parlour that I have admired every time I have seen it, though it is no better than many others are, and nearly all might be.

The simple kitchen-range is well cleaned and polished, the hearth swept and cleared, a warm hearthrug and a centrepiece of carpet spread on the floor, all signs of cookery are put out of sight as much as practicable, the kitchen dresser is covered with a dark-coloured cloth with a deep border to it, and having thus been changed into a sideboard it has on it a small stand of books, a glass of flowers, and some well-chosen ornaments (during the working day these things have been put by out of the dust), the round table has also a good dark-patterned cloth over it, on which the lady of the house has placed her sewing-machine, while her husband, whose taste for pictures is shown by the selection hung on the walls, is looking over some music and preparing it for use at the glee society which they attend. I have also seen almost exactly the same neat arrangements in a two-room cottage—that is, a cottage with only one dwelling-room and one sleeping-room—but there the pots and pans could not be put out of the room, so they were neatly placed on their hooks and shelves, and all the untidy pans hidden by a curtain across the shelves.

All this neatness and comfort may be said to be in the wife's domain, and not any concern of the husband; but I think not so. Whether the wife or the husband gets a good idea for making the home more healthy and comfortable than it has previously been, they must both take part in carrying out the idea in order

to make it completely successful. It is a great mistake to draw a hard and fast line between the duties of husband and wife in household matters; and, as far as I have seen, that family is always the happiest where the husband is manly and gentle enough to attend to the wants of his children, to nurse them, to amuse them, or to teach them, as opportunity offers—where the wife takes an intelligent interest in her husband's work, and occasionally shares his recreation—and where the children are taught by example more than by precept.

As yet I have said nothing about that part of the house which is often the most neglected—I mean the bedrooms. I am not going to advocate spending more money on bed and bedroom fittings than is usual; indeed, the simpler they are the better for health. Nothing tends more to accumulate dust and dirt than ample bed-curtains, valances, and such-like. If you are strong and sturdy, it is best to have no bed-curtains, and even if you are liable to catch cold, the most you require is a curtain half a yard wide at each side the bed head.

What I have chiefly to advocate is the free use of fresh air in your bedrooms; on that, as much as on any one thing else, depends your health and comfort.

I have already reminded you that our noses are very good guides to follow as to the condition of the air we breathe; and if you will take your nose from the fresh air into an ordinary bedroom early in the morning, after several persons have passed the night there, your nose will be pretty certain to be highly offended by the air of that room, and you may then be sure that the sleepers have not been refreshed to anything like the degree they might have been if they had been feeding all night on fresh air instead of breathing the same air again and again throughout the night.

All the experience of hospitals, barracks, and other such public buildings proves the vital necessity of well ventilating our sleeping-rooms; the only question left is how to do it most comfortably; and this is usually much easier in a bedroom than a sitting-room, because you know exactly where the sleepers are to lay their heads, so you can easily arrange to avoid a draught at that place or places, and there is no serious discomfort in having a slight draught across the floor of a bedroom. All you have to do is to provide a way in for fresh air, arranged not to blow on the sleepers' heads, and a way out for the hot spent air that gathers near the ceiling, and the air of your room is at once purified comfortably.

Wherever there are sash windows to a bedroom it is best to open the top part of the window just a little. This allows air to enter at the mid-height or meeting bars of the window, where it will be turned upward, and will spread gently through the room, and the spent air can go out at the top of the window near the ceiling. Take care not to open the window too much: I have often met with people who have been convinced by some lecturer of the vital necessity of opening their bedroom windows, and have gone home and opened them six inches to begin with, have thereby got a bad cold, and have firmly determined never again to try ventilation. They ought to have begun by opening the window one-eighth of an inch each night for the first week, then one-quarter inch for the next week, ultimately getting to one inch of opening for cool weather, reduced to, say, half an inch on cold nights and increased considerably in hot weather.

In all improvements in ventilation we must take care to make changes thus gradually, for however unhealthy our habits may have been, and however much we may presently gain in health and comfort by better habits, still the change should always be made gradually, or it may occasion temporary discomfort or even temporary illness.

Many people trust to the bedroom chimney for ventilation while they have no fire in the grate. This is a very uncertain and uncomfortable means, for supposing the chimney to draw it will remove the cool and comparatively pure air from near the floor, leaving undisturbed the hot foul air near the ceiling. It is best when you do not use a fire in the grate to make an opening into the flue, say four inches square, near the ceiling, and close up the fireplace opening; the chimney will then draw away the worst air in the room, and a very moderate opening of the window will suffice to supply fresh air.

The bedroom, like the scullery already referred to, gives ample opportunity for washing all over to any one who will use it. You generally have a large wash-bowl and some soap and towels. If you can provide an old tea-tray to stand on, or else a couple of towels, you may have a good wash any time. I have often known young men in lodgings use this plan, and feel daily refreshed and invigorated by a cold rinse first thing in the morning.

Talking of washing reminds me of a useful hint in reference to house cleaning. I have not said much about cleaning the house, the furniture, the bed-clothes, &c., because almost every one knows how much healthier and more comfortable a clean house is than

dirty one ; but many careful housewives avoid cleaning the doors and other painted work, because they know that soap will soon destroy the paint. Now if, instead of soap, you will use pea-meal, such as is used to make pease-pudding, you can make a good lather and thoroughly clean any painted surface without injuring it.

In conclusion, let me again urge you not to neglect any improvement because you think it is the landlord's duty rather than yours. Remember that many landlords now-a-days provide us with things that were never formerly expected by tenants : free water supply, free gas, interior painting and papering, gas-fittings, and even window-blinds, are frequently included in the cottage rental ; and if a good tenant adds a few little fittings to his house he is not likely to lose anything by it, as the landlord or agent is usually glad to encourage such good habits. So please consider carefully these hints for improving health and comfort ; read also some of the excellent "Health Lectures for the People" already published at one penny each. Decide what should be done in your particular cottage, and "If you want a thing doing, do it yourself."

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