



The Home Department

Conducted by
Helen Watts McKee

Robin Redbreast.

My old Welsh neighbor over the way
Crept softly out in the sun in spring,
Pushed from her ears the locks of gray
And listened to hear the robin sing.
Her grandson, playing at marbles,
stopped,
And, cruel in sport, as boys will be,
Tossed a stone at the bird who, sing-
ing, hopped,
From bough to bough on the apple
tree.

"Nay," said the grandam, "have you
not heard,

My poor, bad boy, of the fiery pit?
How, drop by drop, this merciful bird
Carries the water which quenches it?
He brings cool dew in his little bill
And lets it fall on the souls of sin;
You can see the mark on his red
breast still,
Of fires that scorch as he drops it in.

"My poor Bron rhuddyn! My breast-
burned bird!

Singing so sweetly from limb to
limb;
O, very dear to the heart of God
Is he who pities the lost, like him."

"Amen!" I said, to the beautiful myth,
Sing, bird of God, in my heart as
well;

Each tender thought is a drop where-
with

To cool and lessen the fires of hell.
Prayers of love like rain-drops fall,
Tears of pity, of falling dew,
O, dear to the heart of the Lord are
all

Who suffer like him for the good
they do. —Whittier.

March.

The reign of the midnight is ended,
There's a flush of the dawn on the
hill,

There's a carol of birds in the valley,
And paled is the evening chill.
There's a stir of leaves in the forest,
A tinting of gold in the morn,
The robin is piping—the spring-time
Anew in its freshness is born.

Chemistry in Cooking.

A popular writer for a grange paper
thinks that a knowledge of the chemi-
cal composition of flour, meat and po-
tatoes, and the effect of various meth-
ods of preparation will enable a
housewife to put her learning to econ-
omical uses, and to do her cooking on
such a basis as to produce palatable
dishes with no loss of nutriment, and
at minimum expense. As a matter of
fact, this lady says, an uneducated
cook, even though she enjoys the re-
putation of "always making things
taste good," is seldom a saving cook;
not because she intends to be waste-
ful, but because she has not the scien-
tific knowledge regarding food ma-
terials and their management which
would enable her to be saving. On
the other hand, an intelligent cook
has a scientific reason for every di-
rection and every process. She not
only is able to produce the most ap-
petizing results, but to do so with
the greatest economy of time, labor
and money.

The same is true in other depart-
ments which come under the care of
the housewife. A knowledge of chem-
istry and the ability to make a few
simple tests would enable her to avoid
the use of a great many frauds—for
example, washing compounds that are
utterly worthless, or injurious; toilet
powders containing bismuth and ar-

senic; expensive baking powders that
contain alum or something worse;
dangerous ointments, quack medi-
cines, poisonous washes, etc. This
writer strongly urges that girls should
study chemistry in the school, not only
for mental discipline and culture, but
for its practical and economic value.
The day when it was deemed a mark
of refinement to profess ignorance of
culinary matters is, happily, passed.

Let us encourage the cooking
schools.

The Better Way.

Dear, discouraged sisters, I wish I
could sit down with you, in your
homes, and talk with you—real heart-
to-heart talks, such as only thorough-
ly in earnest women may have. It is
because I know, from years of ex-
perience, just how disheartening much
of your trials are that I can enter so
fully into your longings and aspira-
tions after the "something better"
which each of you so intensely craves.
It is because, too, that I feel that
there is but one known road by which
you may reach the haven towards
which your wistful eyes are turning,
that I so earnestly wish to set your
feet in the right path.

There are many things which you
must learn for yourself. Page after
page of the book of life must not only
be read, but diligently studied, and
the mistakes which you are sure to
make must be used as stepping-stones
to carry you over the riotous waters of
discontent. One of the hardest les-
sons, perhaps, will be the one that
teaches you that absolutely nothing is
drudgery, in the sense in which tired,
discouraged housekeepers use the
word; there must be preparatory
work in all things, and much of this
work seems so useless, so burden-
some; yet there is a sameness, so far
as routine is concerned, in all things
under the sun—in the highest, as in
the lowest walks of life. The "blue-
devils" are all of one kin, whether
they work in palace or hovel; the
"mentally mighty," as well as the
"fool with the slanting forehead" must
all fight the battles of life, and not
every one may wear, here, the victor's
laurels. But who shall dare say we
have failed, even though we fall? We
are all soldiers; we must each face the
foe some time, somewhere, somehow.
It may cost us something to be always

the ruts of life by willing; yet, under
your words I can hear the sigh: Dear
heart, you do not always feel, any
more than I do, that, out of the ruts
into which your life has fallen, you
can lift yourself by willing and do-
ing."

Then we must try to feel that our
lives have fallen into such grooves for
some wise purpose. Was it not the
Man of Galilee who, as the burdens of
the world pressed heavily upon him,
fell upon his face and prayed, "If it
be possible, let thus cup pass from
me?" There spoke the human side;
but the Divine knew that this was a
work which he alone might do, and
he rested in the wisdom of the Father.
Is it not, then, "the better part" to
do faithfully, hopefully, these tasks
that have, somehow, fallen to our
hands? Is there not a certain uplift-
ing, a sense of honor, in thus doing
in a manner worthy of our own self-
respect? Have we not a pride in hav-
ing brought comeliness out of confu-
sion?

Try to invent new ways of doing
the old tasks; look always for the
bright places—they are always near
you; resolve that you will not let your
work drag you down. Do not allow
yourself to think always of your
work; your hands can be taught to
perform your coarser duties the while
your mind soars into higher altitudes,
just as in your music, while your soul
delights in the sentiments and sweet
sounds, your trained fingers fly over
the ivory keys, with no conscious
guidance from your mind. When you
had to crone over the old "one, two,
three, one, two, three," counting,
watching lest you should "finger"
wrong—that was (or, was it?) the
drudgery, the drudgery of preparation,
without which you never could have
gained this entrancing mastery over
the keys. Many a tear you have shed
over the despised "Instruction Book,"
but do you regret it now, as you bring
from the glistening keys such soul-
satisfying strains?

It is true, we may not always con-
quer self, or change our environments;
the tasks imposed may be too great
for our frail strength, our cares too
multifold, and often there will seem
no song to be sung, no seeming ap-
preciation of all our conscientious
duty-doing, and, like my correspon-
dent, we say "wish we could throw
the whole push into the fire and give
up." Well, then I do not know but it
might be the best thing to do—just
to thrust everything out of our lives
except the one thought of resting, go
away by ourselves and just rest. And,
bye-and-bye, when we felt strong
enough to face things again, go back
with the determination to simplify
matters, reduce the demands of duty,
set a stern limit to our doing, fitting
our burdens to our back, and making
it a rule of our better ordering that
"the life is more than meat, and the
body is more than the raiment." It
has been said that it is often better to
buy a new stocking than to patch the
old one, and if you can do neither
without wearing holes in the family
temper, it is no sin to go bare-footed.

March Winds.

While our sisters of the northern
states have not yet finished their
"spring sewing," those of the extreme
south are already starching their
dainty muslins and shaking out their
filmy lawns. Over the inland states,

from the south to north, the spring
fever is steadily advancing, and the
house-cleaning contagion is also
working its way up from the southern
borders. The house-wives along the
line of march are beginning to in-
dulge in fits of abstraction, calcula-
ting the cost of fresh wall-paper, com-
paring tints on the color cards, inter-
esting themselves in the prices of
paints, new carpets, fresh draperies,
etc., in a way that is, to say the least,
perfectly alarming to the experienced
husband.

While our sisters further to the
southward are already in the throes of
the disease, we, who are yet exempt,
may just as well make the most of
our brief respite; our time will soon
come.

We have among us a great many
farm sisters, and I want to talk with
them about the flowers we are going
to have. I know their lives are busy
ones, especially in the spring days,
but that must not hinder us having
some beauty mixed with the business.

First, then, let us think about the
desirable plants we are to have close
to the house, where we can enjoy
them while we work. Of course the
chickens will put in their protest; but
we must outwit them. We must not
try to raise a numberless variety of
mixed plants in little beds dotted all
over the yard; if we do, we must
guard them with little, crooked, un-
even sticks, covered with brush, or
some other ugly rubbish calculated to
save them from the scratching biddies,
and the yard will look like a brush
heap, itself. It will be better to raise
our seedling flowering plants as we do
our garden things—out of their range,
in the vegetable garden.

We shall be safe—comparatively—
in planting a few well started clumps
of hardy perennials, or biennials, close
up along the porch, or the sides of
the house; in a border along the yard
fences, too, and if we do have to
fence them in with sticks and brush,
these will soon grow above them, and
can take care of themselves.

It would have served the purpose
better, could we have set them last
fall, but if we do not delay the work
too long this spring, many of them
will do as well. We should have
plenty of roses mixed in with the
other plants, and along a sunny bor-
der there should be a sprinkle of ever-
blooming teas; there should be
clumps of fall bloomers, and plenty of
hardy garden pinks and petunias. If
you get them started this spring
(some of the finest will not bloom
the year they are set out), you will
have them well established for the
years to come; they will require little
care, will grow better all the time,
and you can thus defy the worst
scratcher in your flock.

Cover every ugly post and fence with
hardy vines—the blooming kinds. If
you are one of the "no time" women,
do not plant annuals; do not plant
tender kinds that you must "fuss
over," or that the roots of which must
be put in the cellar for fear of frost.
Leave such to the woman who has
leisure; do you stick to the hardy
kinds, and there are plenty of them
—beautiful things, too, in both flower
and foliage. It is possible that the
gude mon may suggest a grape-vine,
for economical reasons; but don't you
do it. Tell him that belongs to the
fruit garden; and do you insist on
having the flowers—roses, honeysuck-
les, clematis, hardy solanums, aris-
tolochia, woodbines, ivys, wisterias—
they are all hardy; all beautiful; and
all cheap.

Query Box.

Vallie S., Taylorville, Ill.—The au-
thorship of the poem, "Beautiful
Snow," is much disputed. I do not
think it is certainly known who wrote
it.

L. E., Lisbon, Ia.—Plenty of fresh
air, sunshine and hot water, together

Question Box.

The conductor of the Home De-
partment will be glad to answer
questions concerning matters of
interest to Housekeepers. Make
your questions as brief as possible
and address all communications
to "Home Department, The Com-
moner, Lincoln, Nebr."

on guard—to always present a bold
front to every foe, and oftentimes
the foe will seem hardly worth the ef-
fort it costs us; but does not the Good
Book say something about "the little
foxes that spoil the vines?"

One of my letters says: "You talk
of a person lifting herself out of