The Home

The Garret

By Margaret Sutton Briscoe

Ye mind me o' departed days.

Not a mere air-chamber reached through a hole in the ceiling, nor yet a dusty "glory-hole," though the latter has its own charm, but a real garret of generous proportions, just dusty enough to yield the proper garret odors. Leading out from the main room there ought to be a small inner garret with odd nooks and corners, in which are heaped apologetic resemblances to "glory-holes," enough like those dear old-fashioned horrors to be interesting, yet not so untidy as to shock the housewifely soul.

In this smaller room the closed shutters are green, and in one of the slats a bumblebee has bored his way, leaving a round hole through which the sunlight streams—a bright beam for the dust to dance in. The shaft of light crosses the room, to end at last under an old red sofa with three legs; the fourth is gone, but a soap-box supplies its place. What a spot of spots where greedy youth may read forbidden pages! To creep into that inner garret, to hide under the decrepit sofa and fling open the proscribed volume on the floor where the light from the bumblebee's hole strikes the page, is to gather such stolen honey as the bees know nothing of.

What is the volume?

An old, green-bound copy of "The Vicar of Wakefield."

To glance toward it even now, unforbidden, on the bookshelves, is to recall as well the inner garret, the red sofa, and the bumblebee's hole.

Perhaps a broken slat in the shutter would answer almost as well as a bee-hole, and would have to answer in the city; but a garret with memories should be in the country; for mud-daubers are country-bred, and daubers' nests built under the window-sills are indispensable to a *real* garret. Shutters cannot keep the dauber out. A thin and dainty insect, the slats are but open doors to him as he buzzes in, carrying his balls of rolled mud with him. It is not cruel to break up a mud-daubers' nest; for they are a distinct housewifely offense. If the frail walls crumble delightfully at a judicious poke, and if the young within are fascinatingly white and queer and wormy or weak-winged imitations of their parents, according to the stage of their development, this is all but as the reward of a virtuous effort at cleanliness.

Then, too, the dauber is cruel himself. The food he has sealed into his mud hut for the use of his offspring is living insects, poor things! Some of them thus entombed are still alive, and creep away miserably when released.

How delightful the inner garret is, and not to childhood only. The "glory-heaps" offer food for all ages. Every twelve months it is the part of wisdom for provident youth to overhaul the garret for plunder. What was trash to the childish soul, and left to molder, is but a year later a discovered treasure to the budding mind.

"Mother, may I have this?"

How familiar it sounds!

And no one need be afraid to diminish "glory-holes" by raiding. They are like the widow's cruse, never running dry. But there are some parents who object to garret raids, and perhaps also to possible secret readings; so these hide the key of the garret in a key-basket—which is an act little short of cruelty.

If for no other reason, attics should be built as the place for a quiet weep. Where should one retire to cry, if not to the inner garret! How many childish woes have been there sniffled away, with only the mice to listen! Some shy children will never cry within sound of any ear, however loving. Leave them a hole to creep into and spill over comfortably!

Repressed tears hardening on the heart are not for the soul's health.

Therefore, O mothers, leave the key of the inner garret on a peg in the outer garret, not too high for little arms to reach. The outer garret is secluded enough for the tear of maiden meditation, which, unlike the passionate gusts of childhood, rather courts discovery.

There is a touch of mystery about the closed inner garret that the outer lacks. Mystery does not thrive in a huge attic room, with the windows open, and a children's swing swaying from a great beam that runs across the ceiling. A room which is often entered somehow speaks the fact, and grows more commonplace for this human language. Still, the outer garret has a human charm. The east wall facing the swing smells strangely of camphor. The red-cedar chests standing there in a line have held, every summer season, all the winter clothing, packed layer on layer with camphor between, until the chests themselves have grown to smell like camphor-wood. The white chest on the west wall has a different odor, and is seldom opened. When it is, all the children crowd around. As the lid lifts, that faint, unnamable flavor of the past, which seems to hover about all things which belong to former days, floats out into the room. This is the relic-chest of the family. In it are "mother's" tiny wedding shoes and doll-like gloves, "father's" white wedding waistcoat, "grandmother's" thimble and needle case, her white and gold netted purse, her quaint little bead-bags, and what not that tenderness makes sacred.

But most gorgeous of all is Great-Aunt Harriet's peach silk ball dress, that rustles mightily and stands quite alone. Its waist is very long and very pointed, the bosom laid in "Grecian folds," whatever they may be, and the trimming in rows and rows of "shells," all the most exquisite handwork. The peach silk was made by the first dressmaker of the town in Great-Aunt Harriet's day, and the charge for its making was three dollars and a half!

This statement and the gown always came out from the archives together.

In the south wall to the right of the swing is a huge window with a deep, deep window-sill, in which there is perpetually, as memory asserts, a great blue tureen of preserved strawberries sweetening in the sun. As the swing sways back and forth, the blue tureen and window are first in view, then further along the wall comes a "sampler" in worsted work with these words—which, by the way, are perfect rhythm to swing to—carefully wrought into the canvas: "Worked by Harriet Ann Dufane, in the ninth year of her age."

What a living reproach to following generations, who at nine years of age have no such framed monument of industry to lift on high! Yet Great-Aunt Harriet must have had her weakness also—witness the peach-colored silk. The north wall holds a high, very high mantel-shelf, with an enormous china cat on each end, with sweeping ears that almost scratch the ceiling—so memory says.

Why is Madame Memory such an unblushing magnifier?

The child who swung to and fro between the mantel cats and the window in the south wall saw both again years after. The window was of ordinary size, and the sill rather narrow than wide; as for the china cats, they were each, by exact measurement, just one foot high.

Ah, well! what matter?

Though more than the long-eared cats and deep window never existed, an unreal memory is real enough for him who owns it, and if one can sing ecstatically, "My mind to me a kingdom is," may not another claim a modest garret?

The Sins of the Commonplace

The sharpest distinction between the rich and the poor, or, more truly stated, the distinction between the refined and the unrefined, is shown in the attention to or neglect of little things, especially in the minor morals of the toilet. Money counts for so little in these matters that it is to be deplored that every mother does not realize the importance of training children in the habits that mark the distinction between refinement and vulgarity, and which become second nature. Care of the hands is a duty that few children are taught to carry out as they should; the care of the hair is too seldom attended to with that nicety which is necessary