



## CHAPTER 31

A FEW DAYS AGO I WROTE JOHN HOWELLS SOME STRONG PRAISES of his work as a designer of this house. I remember John as a little child, and it seems strange and impossible that I have lived, and lived, and lived, and gone on continuously living, until at last that child, chasing along in my wake, has built a house for me and put a roof over my head. I can't realize that this is that child.

Speaking of youth, I am reminded that with some frequency people say to me, "You wouldn't look so young if you had the **bald** head proper to your time of life; how do you preserve that crop of hair?" I have to answer them with a theory, for lack of real knowledge. I tell them I think my hair remains with me because I keep it clean; keep it clean by thoroughly washing it with soap and water every morning, then rinsing it well; then soaping it heavily and rubbing off the soap with a coarse cloth, a process which leaves a slight coating of oil upon each hair—oil from the soap. The cleansing and the oiling combined leave the hair soft and silky, and pleasantly and comfortably wearable the whole day through; for although the hair becomes dirty again within ten hours, either in country or city, it does not become dirty enough to be really rough to the touch and delicately uncomfortable under twenty-four hours; yet it does become dirty enough in twenty-four

hours to make the water cloudy when I wash it.

Now we arrive at a curious thing; the answer to my explanation always brings forth the same old unvarying and foolish remark, to wit—"Water ruins the hair because it causes the roots to become rotten." This remark is not made in a doubtful tone but in a decided one. Then I say, "How do you know this?" and the confident speaker stands exposed; he doesn't know what to say. If I ask him if he has ruined his own hair by wetting it, it turns out that he doesn't wet it often, therefore he is not speaking from experience; if I ask him if he has personal knowledge of cases where the roots turned rotten because of wetting, it turns out he hasn't a single case of the kind to offer.

Strange—it is just like religion and politics! In religion and politics people's beliefs are in almost every case gotten at second-hand, and without examination, from authorities who have not themselves examined the questions at issue but have taken them at second-hand from other nonexaminers, whose opinions about them are not worth one cent.

The human race is odd and curious and interesting. It is constantly washing its face, its eyes, its ears, its nose, its teeth, its mouth, its feet, its legs, and it is thoroughly convinced that cleanliness is next to godliness, and that water is the noblest and surest of all preservers of health, and wholly undangerous, except in just one case—you mustn't apply it to your hair!

The more one examines this matter the more curious it becomes. Every man wets and soaps his hands before he goes to dinner; he washes them before supper; he washes them before breakfast; he washes them before lunch, and he knows, not by guesswork, but by experience, that in all these cases his hands are dirty and need the washing when he applies it. Does he suppose that his bare and unprotected hair, exposed exactly as his hands are exposed, is not gathering dirt all the time?

I am considered peculiar because I wear white clothes both winter and summer. I am peculiar, then, because I prefer to be clean in the matter of clothing—clean in a dirty world; absolutely the only cleanly clothed human being in all Christendom north of the **tropics**. And

that is what I am. All clothing gets dirty in a single day—as dirty as one’s hands would get in that length of time if one washed them only once; a neglect which any lady or gentleman would scorn to be guilty of. All the Christian world wears dark-colored clothes; after the first day’s wear they are dirty, and they continue to get dirtier and dirtier, day after day, and week after week, to the end of their service. Men look fine in their black dress clothes at a fancy dinner, but often those dress-suits are rather real estate than personal property; they carry so much soil that you could plant seeds in them and raise a crop.