

Meditation on Sweeping a Room
Written by Lavinia Goodell
Published in the Principia February 25, 1860

Now I suppose that Charlie, Sen, wouldn't think this parlor needed any sweeping? Stay! I'll throw open the blinds, and take a general view. The most striking thing is the disarranged furniture. As for dirt, there is nothing very definite about it, only the carpet seems enveloped in a dim, hazy atmosphere, making it look a little dull and faded. Probably the aforesaid Charlie, Sen., would just set every chair and ottoman strait back against the wall and consider the room "put to rights!" Probably he would think me quite fanatical for insisting upon any more radical reformation. However, he is safe in his dear, conservative old office – so here goes.

There now! Every ottoman, chair, and table out of the room, and the carpet presents an unbroken surface to the application of the broom. Now, broom, do your duty!

Presto! What a dust! Who would ever have dreamed of all this, lying so innocent and unsuspected in the embrace of this carpet? Now it is flying into my face, and all over the room. How much worse I have made matters! Just see how much mischief agitation has done! Here this poor unoffending dirt was lying quietly upon the floor, and would never have thought of flying all over, so furiously, if it hadn't been for the broom! True, the carpet would have remained rather dingy, but then we can't expect to have everything perfectly pure and bright, in this world of dirt. Better to choose the least of two evils. This shows the folly of trying to make everything perfect, all at once, instead of trying to use a little reason and judgment, and smoothing over matters, and making the best of existing circumstances. Here I have just gone to work on a mere principle; a principle deduced from the syllogism, "All evils should be removed: dirt is an evil; therefore dirt should be removed." What an impractical idea to carry out! What a visionary I am! Why couldn't I have taken all these things into consideration and calculated the consequences before starting such a wild scheme? And yet – pause a moment! Here I have collected quite a quantity of dirt in my dust-pan. So much the less in the parlor. And now I remember past experience, and that I've seen dustier times, and brought out everything bright and clean.

Women are naturally reformers. It is *in* them; "in their bones," as Candice hath it, according to the philosophy "of the bones," alias "intuition." Yes, there *is* a difference in mind, between the sexes. Witness the totally opposite effects which house-cleaning, sweeping, or any kind of "clearing up" produces upon them respectively. We women are all radicals. Arming ourselves with broom and scrub-brushes, hot water and soap, we strike at once at the *root* of the matter. Not a word of compromise will we hear; not a bit of this smoothing over, and letting go – no indeed! Everything has *got to be* moved, and turned upside down and inside out, and every nook and corner explored, and every particle of dust, and every guilty, trembling little wretch of a string, nail, old paper, soiled napkin, ancient glove, antediluvian shoe or boot, dragged forth to the light of day. Disconsolate mortals of the other sex gaze upon the scene with mingled astonishment and dismay. Vain are their feeble interpositions: their pleadings for "peace and tranquility." "First pure, then peaceable," is the most pure promise vouchsafed, and they are obliged to fall back upon the pleasures of hope, for consolation. On our banner is engraved, "No compromise!" Nothing short of the entire abolition of dirt, throughout our domains, will answer our purpose.

Now men are timid, conservative creatures. They dislike agitation. They cannot bear to have things disturbed, any more than Dinah could, in that wonderful kitchen that Mrs. Stowe has

immortalized. Take a peep into the keyhole in any “bachelor’s hall” and see if it isn’t so! See if the table in the middle of the room with both leaves up, isn’t loaded with the most interesting variety of papers, pens and ink, dishes, pins, thread and scissors! See if the floor doesn’t hold several cubic feet of old newspapers, bits of white paper smeared with ink, pokers, coal scuttles, splinters, and all well peppered with dust. No doubt the worthy proprietor, in his heart of hearts, considers all this an evil. But how is he to help himself? Somehow it seemed to come so very naturally, and without any effort on his part; and perhaps he cherishes the hope that it may “die out,” if let alone. At any rate it would only make matters worse, to commence any agitation, as he found one time, when he began to pick up things around, till the dust almost suffocated him. Such are men.

No wonder they don’t like to have us, women, peer too into their great political kitchen! Keeping “bachelors hall” there as they do, it isn’t strange if it should get a little dusty; and hating agitation as they do, it isn’t strange that it should stay dusty. They step out of it so smooth and shining before us, that they think we won’t know the difference, but ‘tis really funny to see how frightened they are, for fear we shall catch them in it! How they hold up their hands in horror, and entreat us not to think of such a thing as opening the door, or even peeping through the key-hole. How they insist is so contrary to our angelic natures (complimentary to themselves, that) something we don’t understand; and, above all, that there is some terrible dragon inside, which will be sure to swallow us down bodily, the moment we enter, and we never shall be heard of, again, and what will become of them? Never mind, let’s get possession of the key, somehow; we can get around them, and then we’ll get in and we’ll give it *such* a scrubbing and cleansing, and fix it up and make it look ever so pretty. We know how!

Here I’ve been leaning meditatively over my broom, this half hour instead of being at work! Meanwhile the dust is nicely settled and ready for me to wipe off **** And now that I’ve rubbed over and arranged the furniture, I am ready to sit down and take another “general view.” How bright and beautiful the carpet has become. Its gay cluster of roses look smilingly up into my face, as much as to say “thank you.” And the chairs and stands and what not, have settled down into their accustomed places, their faces beaming with sober content. Some one has said that every atom, is the universe in miniature. Why isn’t my parlor, then, the world on a small scale? And when the world gets dirty why shouldn’t we arm ourselves, and go to work at it, without being afraid of the dust. It will come out bright, pure, fresh, like my parlor.

Housekeeper