

THE FIRESIDE OF THE FUTURE.

Skeptical young gentlemen and gentlewomen of the mature age of half a-dozen years or so are apt to ask troublesome questions now-a-days with regard to the advent of Santa Claus. The story of his descent through the chimney was well enough in the old days when chimneys were provided with throats big enough for such a purpose; but whatever degree of compression the Christmas Saint may be personally capable of, the scientifically inclined intellects of our modern little folk refuse to believe that such bodily "materializations" as hobby-horses, sleds and other Christmas gifts can be forced down the flue of a grate or through the register of a fireplace heater.

The fact is that we have retained the legend of the chimney after it has "outlived its usefulness," and there is some reason to believe also that we have kept the chimney as well as its legend somewhat longer than need be. It appears probable that, in city houses at least, chimneys will soon come to be considered a mistake and an anachronism. We have already reduced them to their smallest possible size, have shorn them of pretty nearly all their distinguishing characteristics, and we retain them at all rather because of their traditional than of their actual necessity. Why might they not be dispensed with altogether, as candlesticks and snuffers have been? A fire of any sort on a hearth, however small, is an excellent thing doubtless, and a cheerful one certainly, but at the present price of coal and kindling very few of us, comparatively, can afford anything of the sort. A black furnace in the cellar supplies our heat through an unseemly hole in the floor, and even this entails upon us an expense which not many of us can meet without inconvenience. If a cheaper mode of warming houses can be devised there is literally nothing to prevent its adoption. There is nothing at all lovely about a furnace. No traditions cluster around the register. No memories of a happy childhood are borne upon the blasts of hot and unwholesome air sent up from the cellar. No Lares and Penates stand guard over the hole in the wall or floor through which we receive our supplies of artificial heat. The furnace is tolerated as a necessity, not cherished as a friend or a companion. We see no pictures in its face, and hold no mute converse with it. We shut it up without regret the moment the room is warm enough, and any other contrivance which shall do its work as well at smaller cost may take its place without a struggle with sentiment.

It is a little curious, too, that a better and cheaper contrivance has not long ago banished the furnace to the limbo of things obsolete; for we have a better contrivance at hand in the steam pipe and radiator in use in all inns and large buildings. That it furnishes heat at smaller cost and with less danger either of fire or of carbonic acid poisoning is well enough known, and the only reason that it has not taken the place of the dangerous, dirty, unwholesome and expensive furnace is that we Americans are a peculiar people, little given to co-operation in anything which touches our domestic economy. A steam generating apparatus with its attendant engineer is too expensive a thing for one householder to maintain, and householders, in this country at least, are not much in the habit of working together; else it would long ago have become the custom of the several owners of houses in a block to combine and jointly bear the expense of heating all the houses from a single boiler placed somewhere under the sidewalk. This would save expense to each, while each would get a better supply of heat, with no dust, no trouble, and no risk of fire. Steam radiators are more seemly in a parlor, as well as much more convenient, than any register can be, and if they should once become common in private houses there is no reason why good taste in their construction might not make them positively pretty. Any block of buildings might be heated as easily as are the great inns and other large buildings, if the several owners would only join hands; but if they will not there is place and profit for a steam heating company in New York. A company organized as the gas companies are, with boiler houses and steam mains properly jacketed, could furnish heat to houses at a much smaller cost than any householder can make it for himself, and such a company would not long lack business. The insurance associations would lend it powerful aid by their influence, and every physician would become a personal advocate of its cause.