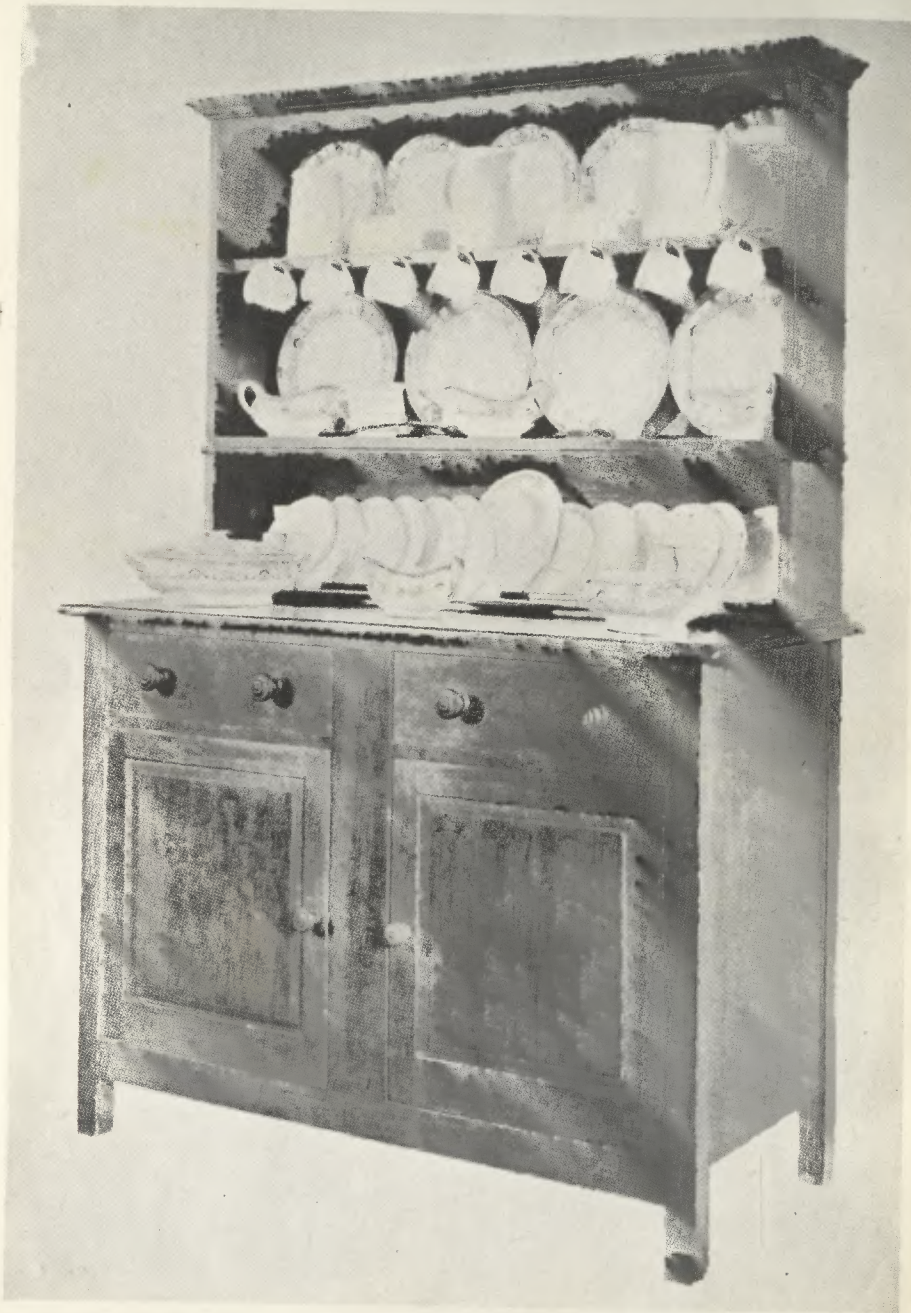


FRONTISPIECE



AN OPEN DRESSER

FURNITURE FOR SMALL HOUSES

A BOOK OF DESIGNS FOR INEXPENSIVE
FURNITURE WITH NEW METHODS OF
CONSTRUCTION AND DECORATION

BY

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FURNITURE FOR SMALL HOUSES.

I. INTRODUCTION.

THE title of this book is intended to include all the smaller types of houses in town or country, whether they be known by the name of villa or cottage. The designs have been prepared in response to hundreds of applications—many from overseas—for assistance in producing pleasant and inexpensive furniture.

It is still happily possible to step into a seventeenth century living room in a wayside cottage or farm-house which has not yet felt the modern touch in furnishing. The instant impression that one gets is of a simple dignity and homely restfulness. The gate-leg table, the dresser, the sturdy chairs, all seem so fit for their place and purpose. It would be absurd to claim that such furniture is altogether suitable for modern needs, but now that thousands of well-planned cottages are to be built it is reasonable to hope that something of the quiet dignity and fitness may be introduced into their furnishing. A well-known and large manufacturer of furniture has recently said that "the humblest home can be made pleasant at no greater expense than is incurred in making it ugly". The designs contained in the following pages are an earnest attempt to prove that the claim made in that statement is both possible and practicable.

It is not claimed that the attempt exhausts the possibilities of design, construction, or finish in suitable furniture for small houses. There is a wide field for local craftsmanship and tradition to vary both form and the manner of making. The designs here shown are done more for experiment and suggestion. Some new ideas have been introduced in the making and finishing. There is no article which cannot be produced by modern methods, hand or machine. Ease in moving and cleaning, and a minimum of work in dusting—pressing needs of the housewife—have been duly considered. Non-essentials, such as cornices and pediments,

have been discarded, and the whole aim of the designer has been to suggest a type of furniture which is useful, pleasant to look at, and moderate in price. It is readily admitted that the great bulk of cheap furniture has been both flimsy and ugly. Little or no thought has been given to suitable proportions and dimensions for small rooms. The designers and manufacturers must not take all the blame for this, for the public have been too ready to demand a showy article with plenty of polish and plate glass rather than a really serviceable one. This is well illustrated by the type of sideboard or overmantel overloaded with ugly and useless details which add to the cost and mean so much labour to keep clean. On the other hand, if the public are to be educated in selection and taste, education can only come through the designers and makers who put the goods on the market, and the salesman who comes into personal contact with the purchaser. There is now a decided demand for brighter homes and better furniture, and there is no excuse that ugliness and flimsy work should be the commonly accepted features of cheap goods. Fitness for use, good proportions, and bright, pleasant colour will not cost any more than bad proportions and unpleasant colour. As a matter of fact they should cost less, for better proportions would mean a reduction in material, and good lines on the inevitable "apron" or "curtain" pieces could be cut quicker than the coarse, switchback, curves which are made to fit any job or position. Machine productions should make no difference to the right application of the above principles, and we have to get rid of the fallacy that machine-made articles must necessarily be unpleasant in form and repulsive to good taste. It is hoped that the general public will begin to realise some of these simple and practical principles, and to apply them when purchasing household goods. With a public asking for better things and knowing what they wanted there would be no doubt as to improvement in quality.

A complete set of the furniture illustrated has been made, with the consent of the Education Authorities of the London County Council, at the Shoreditch Technical Institute. The set comprised a more or less completed furnishing for a five-roomed cottage, including a living room, parlour, and three bedrooms. The articles in the largest bedroom (see Plate I) were made of birch and whitewood polished only. In the living room (Plate II), the chairs were made of birch and the other articles of whitewood and deal. These were stained a light brown and polished.

The sets in the smaller bedrooms were made of deal and painted (Plate III). The painting was done as an experiment. Hitherto, cheap bedroom furniture has either been stained to imitate mahogany or walnut or grained in a wretched attempt to make it look like oak or maple. Paint, as a medium for finish, offers many advantages. It is durable, easily applied, and it gives a wide field for variety in bright and pleasant colours. Above all there is no sham or imitation about it. Plain painting in one or two colours would be infinitely better than the ugly yellow oak graining. This graining is done with a steel comb, and in the two bedroom sets a similar process has been adopted in two colours of paint, for example, blue superimposed on green. The combing is done before the blue is dry, and the green shows through the combings. An almost limitless number of patterns can be done by the comb (see Plate XLVI), and it is obvious that there can also be a wide variety of colours. Paint has a great advantage over stain in that the cheaper woods, such as deal, and "seconds" or "thirds" in pine, which are not suitable for staining, are quite adequate for painted furniture. The cheap bedroom "suites" of satin-walnut, though ugly in design, would look more pleasant painted in good colours than polished in the ghastly yellow which has always been the recognised finish for them. Is it not time that the "trade" began to consider the need for a brighter and more honest finish for cheap goods? Here, at least, is a suggestion for anyone to carry beyond the experimental stage. The special construction for painted work will be described in detail when the actual making of the articles is under discussion in the chapters devoted to wardrobes, dressers, chest of drawers, etc., etc., but the designer disclaims any desire for finality in design, construction, or finish. It is agreed that cheap production can only be obtained by a large output, and that to a certain extent standardisation is inevitable. There is not so much to fear in this if local traditions are allowed for, and there is plenty of play and opportunity for variety in form and colour without adding to the cost or seriously interfering with standard methods of production.

The author is indebted to the Design and Industries Association¹ for much help and encouragement. This Association is composed of manufacturers, designers, and business men and women who are interested in the betterment of household goods. They maintain that these things

¹ 6 Queen Square, W.C. 1.

can be both "cheap and good," and are ready to encourage any effort in that direction. In pursuance of this policy the Association has taken a first-hand interest in this experimental furniture. The suggestion that paint would make a better and brighter finish for furniture was immediately taken up, and the Association obtained permission from the L.C.C. to carry out experiments at the Brixton School of Building. The two painted bedroom sets are a result of these experiments in combed paint. Many of the other designs in the book could be treated in a similar manner. The Association secured the loan of the furniture for exhibition purposes, and arrangements are being made with firms to put the articles on the market.

The author gratefully acknowledges the generous co-operation of the Principal (S. Hicks, Esq.), Miss H. J. Plowright, and members of the Staff at the Shoreditch Technical Institute.

PLATE I

