

## PRACTICAL DWELLINGS.

**I**N presenting to the readers of the HOME-MAKER this series of sketches, I have not hoped to add anything new or suggest any startling reformation; I shall be satisfied if I have interested a few of you, who contemplate building, enough to give it your most careful study, looking into every detail of the future home. Too often the whole thing is relegated to the village carpenter, or some co-operative plan company. The latter bear the same relation to architecture that patent medicine does to the medical profession; they never take into consideration the minute differences in tastes and organisms.

Of all industries, none is of more importance than the providing of fixed habitations for the human family. Though the relentless hand of time may have destroyed every vestige of history or the literature of a race, as long as one of its buildings, even one of the ruined and crumbling walls of a nation remain, we read the story of their religion and their life.

The study of Latin and Greek together with the merited admiration which we bestow upon the architecture of civilized Europe and the East, have so long made us mere copyists, that we have no national architecture. Beautiful as we find the work of Greece and Rome in its native element, transplanted to the nineteenth century under our trying climate, the absence of the color of sky and landscape, the differences in religious and social life make it but an empty form of art. In judging the merit of any architectural work, its first virtue is utility, going hand in hand with stability. A building must not only be strong, but have the appearance of repose. The fantastic tricks of design that suspend bay-windows, balconies, and towers from mid-air, apparently held by an especial dispensation of Providence, rows of windows supporting a solid wall of masonry, ill-placed and poorly executed orna-

ment, are mainly due to the indifference of the public in regard to the profession of architecture. In ancient Venice a new figure, window, or a metal grill were matters of general discussion in the hall and upon the Rialto. Think of the noblest example of architecture in your own vicinity; how few know who designed or executed it; its chief virtues, as well as its most glaring defects, pass unnoticed; the surest thing to bring it into notice will be its novelty. Let it be coarse, fantastic, or absurd, and it answers the same purpose: it has attracted the attention of the public.

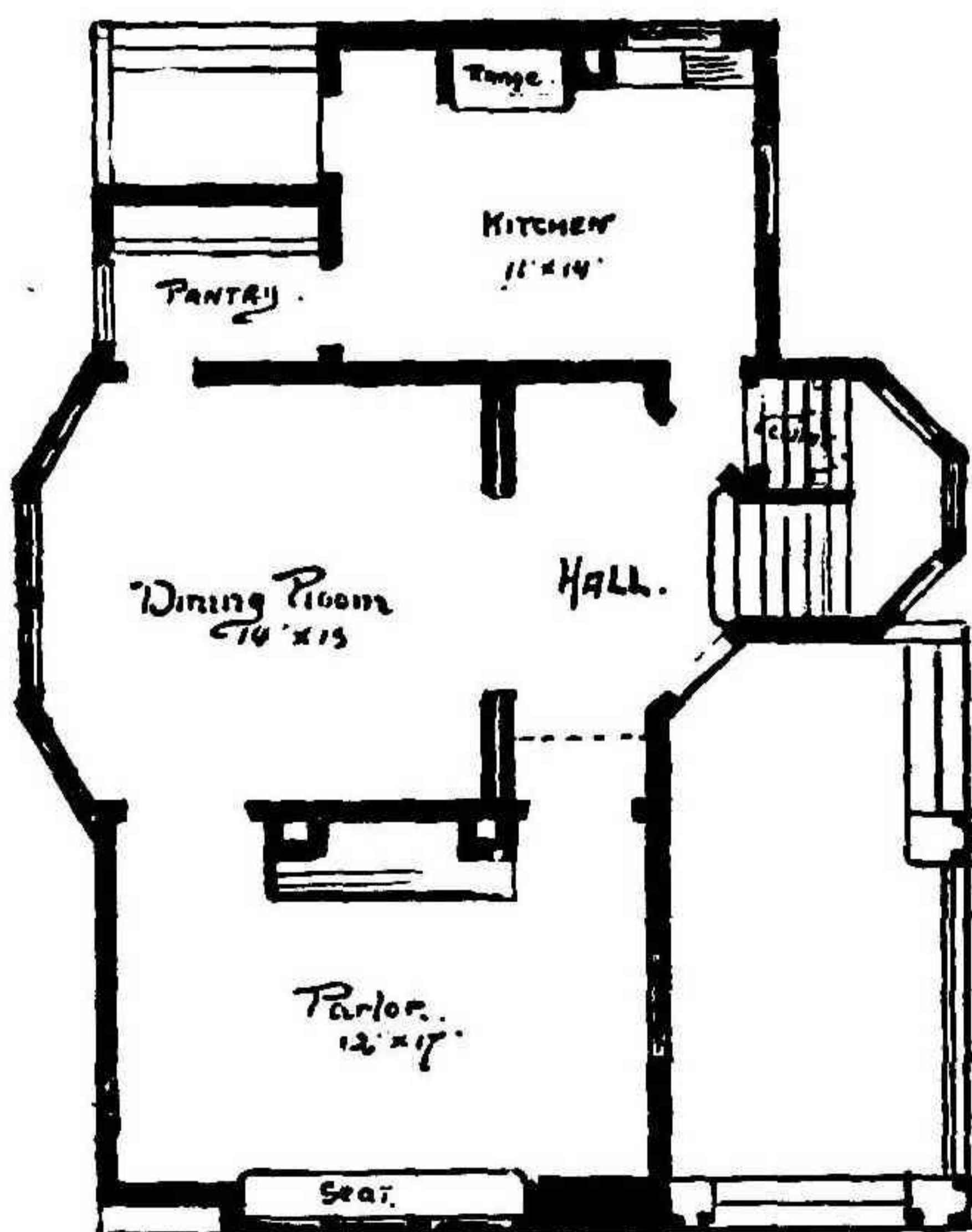
The laws of artistic unity demand that the marked contrast between the homes of the rich and the dwelling-places of our great laboring masses shall be less striking; when from the clean cemented cellar to the smoke-wreathed chimney there shall be nothing which does not yield its share of comfort, utility, and beauty, nothing which does not suggest the wisdom of its position; and judgment in reducing household labor to a minimum.

Ornament is too often added to hide some defect of construction or of outline. The sculptor and the artist are the architect's best allies, but every building should depend upon the massing, outline, construction, and material for its merit; stripped of all ornament, it should be beautiful in its monumental strength. As soon as we cultivate a nation of critics, we will have made rapid strides in the advancement of our architecture.

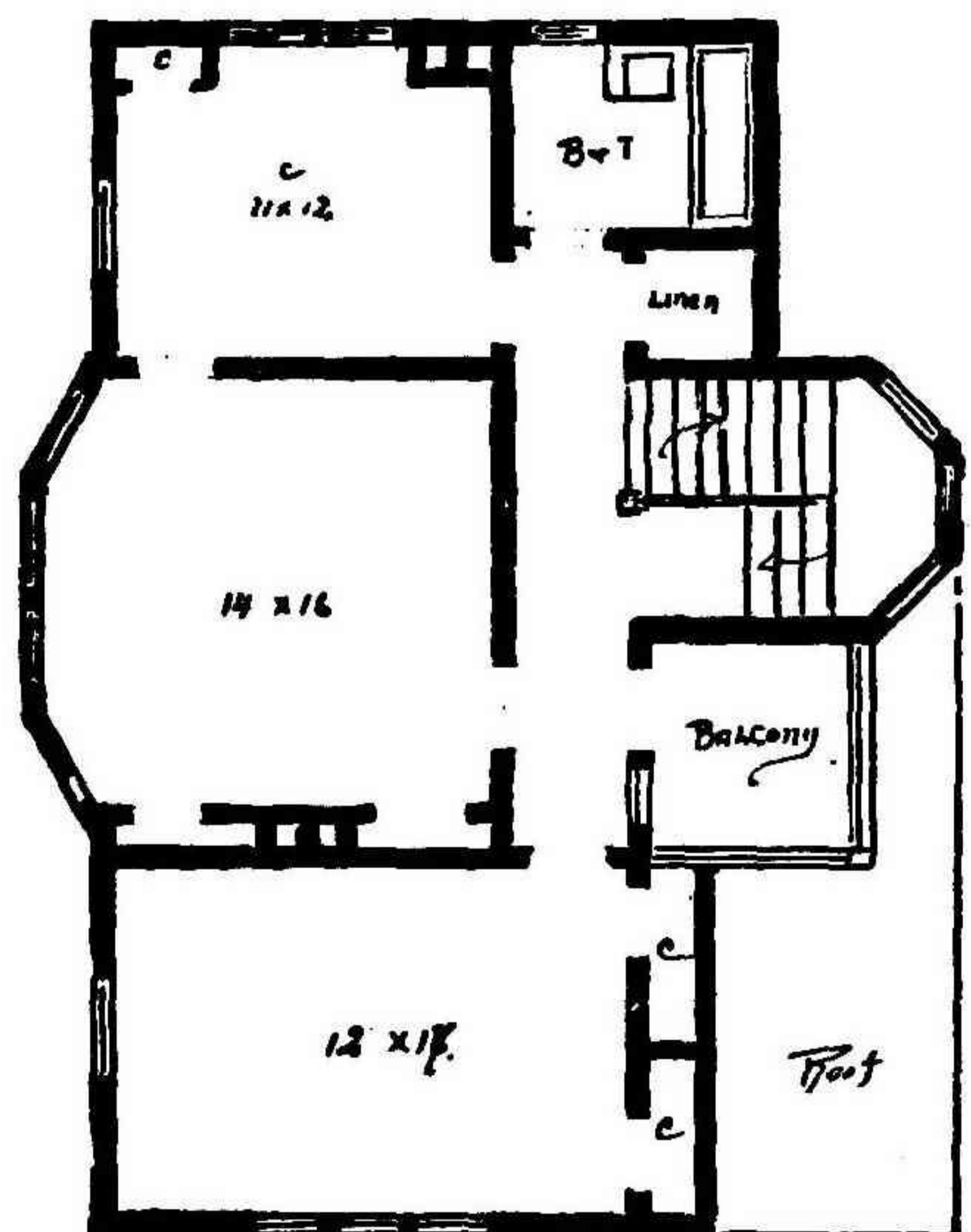
In presenting this little cottage, I shall hope to evoke that same criticism, and each one of my readers will find something to improve. I have started with such a modest little house, that it scarcely deserves the name of an architectural study; but I have found the combining of convenience with a limited outlay a difficult problem, and I prefer starting with a small house. Each house should have a stair



PERSPECTIVE SKETCH of Cottage  
*Marionna Fickel Architect*



First Floor Plan.



2<sup>nd</sup> Floor Plan.

hall with the apartments opening out of it, each room communicating with the neighboring apartment, the wall-spaces so distributed that there is an appropriate space for each of the pieces of furniture usually provided, plenty of light and air. This house I have arranged with open grates, heating the chambers over the dining-room and parlor. A hot-air flue from the kitchen range supplies sufficient heat for the rear chamber.

Plumbing, heating, and special ventilation I will take up at another time.

Where it is impossible to get good hard wood at a reasonable price, I would suggest white pine painted to correspond with the wall-surfaces. In a small house plain felt papers or small patterns are in every way preferable; the same is applicable to carpets: the unbroken surfaces do not emphasize the limited sizes.

The hearths and mantel-breast faced with plain tile or glazed brick, with a high mantel-shelf and china cabinet in the dining-room and a glass in the parlor.

The closet in the dining-room is supplied with three drawers for table-linen, a fruit-closet for preserves, and shelves for china and glass. The shelves on one side to be high enough to allow the flour and sugar barrel to go under, with hinged lids in the counter-shelf above.

The closet opening from the rear porch is for pails, clothes-line, pins, and all the utensils which are usually so picturesquely festooned around a rear porch.

The kitchen dresser is 7' 0" high, the counter-shelf 2' 10" above the floor, the doors and shelves 16" above bring the first three shelves within easy reaching distance. A stairway from the storage-closet over the main stairs communicates with the attic space. The chambers are all small, but have good furnishing spaces.

I think it is advisable to have few members in the mouldings, and that the newels and balusters shall be plain and graceful in shape. There may be some beauty in minute mouldings that have to be cleaned with an especial care for each turn, but it is a great waste of labor.

However small the house may be, I would insist on its having four fronts: back front and side fronts, as well as front front. What a spectacle of poverty the rear elevation of most houses disclose, and it is far oftener from habit than economy. The front is resplendent with bays, porches, and stained glass, the front gable a marvel of panels and mouldings, while the rear is scarcely spared a simple barge-board, and is a succession of one shed after another.

People are as little likely to stand directly in front of your house to judge its architectural beauty as your friends are to judge character by those few fleeting angelic spells we all have when we sit in the sunshine of our self-approbation, forgetful of the long shadows of remembered faults and follies that play around us.

*Minerva Parker.*



Parker, Minerva. "Practical Dwellings." *The Home-Maker V.4* (1891). Nineteenth Century Collections Online. Web. 21 Sept. 2015.

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