

TO COMFORT THE SICK

INGENIOUS INVENTIONS TO HELP THE AFFLICTED.

Improvements Effected in Adjustable Chairs, Stretchers, and Back Rests—Where the Inventor Gets His Ideas—An Armless Chair.

Wonders are being done for the invalid. Even he who knows he can never be cured, never take his place again among the robust and free-limbed—or who perhaps never had a place among them and was always apart and misshapen—may take heart and a likeness of comfort, for invention has supplied him with resources as nearly answering to the working gear of the human body as mere matter may be capable of. Mother wit, sympathetically applied, the additional facilities that science has furnished to the inventor in the last few years, and a better and truer gauging of the invalid's individual wants and needs have brought about valuable results. Helps and expedients of which the invalid of 1888 had only a very ill-defined idea have in 1898 taken practical shape and gone ahead of the original idea in the way of thoughtful contrivance for avoiding pain and forestalling all emergencies.

Back rests, transfer lifts, bed trays, adjustable stands and tables, and arrangements for comfort or diversion in one way or another are all more adaptable, more practical and more satisfactory than formerly. The needy invalid, he with a purse as limited as his physical force, profits by these inventions as well as the millionaire, the difference in grade and price of the articles offered being almost invariably a matter of ornament or some detail having nothing to do with the running gear.

For twelve or fifteen years now the make and mechanism of rolling and reclining chairs have been steadily on the up grade," said a man, who, for more than that time, has been dependent on such furniture. "But the special adaptation to individual needs, in even slight details, was never so particularly attended to as it is now, and was never at such a pitch of perfection. The newest improved invalid chair is made on a principle of automatic adjustment corresponding almost exactly with the pivotal points of the human body. The practical application of this principle was no easy task, nor was it the result of any sudden inspiration. I know the man who worked it out, and it cost him years of study and experiment. The chief points in the chair mechanism where the back rest, and leg rests are hinged to the frame of the chair, are exactly in line with the hip and knee joints of the occupant's body. When such a chair is ordered, careful measurements are taken in order that the chair pivots and body pivots may be as nearly one in equipoise and motion as is possible. I can sit in my new chair and assume any forward or backward movement with only the slightest output of strength. Another great improvement is the newly invented ratchet cam, by which the weakest invalid who can use his hands at all may lower and raise his chair to any desired position and lock it so without outside aid. He can unlock it also with equal facility. Until this device was perfected all rolling chairs of this class were unlocked and locked by means of thumbscrews, or friction cams, which took more strength in the manipulating than the average cripple or sick man was capable of. With an adjustment of pivots and hinges so perfectly in unison with the rudimentary movements of the body that the chair may be straightened out when wanted, the leg rest raised up or down, or the chair reverted to an upright posture without inconvenience on the part of the occupant or resort to outside aid, it really looks as though invention could be pushed no further so far as this special appurtenance of invalid furniture goes.

"The newest reclining or rolling chairs or both combined, all have the divided leg rest now. Before that happy thought took form, whenever one leg went up the other had to go and if one leg went down its fellow had to be put down. With the leg rests separate, the patient may tilt one leg up at whatever restful angle he wishes and put the other foot on the floor if he is able to, or else lower the other leg rest comfortably at will. All this changing about he can do for himself by merely touching the adjusting handle. Only those who were long accustomed to the stereotyped, old style chair, which was an admirable rest for the well person, but a poor contrivance for the cripple who lived in it, can appreciate the godsend that these new adjustable chairs are."

Half a score of minor improvements have been tacked on to furniture for invalids within the past year or two which trivial as they may seem, are of vast importance in the invalid world. In the first place, no up-to-date invalid chair is now permanently upholstered. Whether the pillows and cushions are cov-

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ered with leather, silk and wool tapestry, or simple cotton fabric, they are all made separate, so that they may be removed singly or all taken entirely away, as the comfort of the invalid demands, the strong yet pliant cane that forms the back of the chair affording an agreeable change for the time being to a person weary of one position. All these cushions are stuffed with hair, or else elastic cotton felt that will neither heat the body unhealthfully nor mat and become uncomfortable. The late style rolling chair is mounted on steel elliptic springs instead of on the ordinary trucks, and for patients who are keenly susceptible to pain this innovation is a great boon. These chairs can be used out of doors as well as in the house, and the occupant experiences very little jar even when going over doorsteps or along uneven pavements. The slightest motion is torture to a certain class of patients, those with spinal trouble, acute rheumatism, &c., and so far as life can be made tolerable to them these springs that do not in any way interfere with the automatic action of the chair afford comfort. For a person able to use his hands, or for one whose hands are helpless but whose feet can be counted on, a description of tricycle has been invented by means of which he can trundle himself about grounds or along roadways. Machines have been made for people able to use only one hand but both feet, and also for those whose hands are available and who have one good foot. Springs and automatic adjustment and a support for the weak back are all combined in this vehicle, and the upright handles are adjusted just at the correct height to prevent fatigue for the arms that control them.

The latest addition to the list of house appurtenances for invalids is the walking chair. The riling one can propel it anywhere about the room, provided there is a moderate amount of strength in the lower limbs and feet. This chair has the tiniest of rubber tired wheels that add but little to its weight. It is framed of oak of strongest and lightest quality, with an antique finish, and has a cane seat. There are no detachable parts to get lost, there is no fussing with set screws, and, though a combination carrying, rolling, and walking affair, it is so comparatively simple in appearance as to belie its many callings. It can be adjusted so as to convey the occupant up or down either steep or gently pitched stairs, whether winding or straight, and still preserve the level. Years of experiment and study have taken shape in this invention. For lifting desperately sick people about, and saving both the strain on the nurse and the strain on the patient, a newly designed transfer lift has been introduced. This is a framed stretcher with suitable accompaniments attached to a high curved pole fixed in a stand, to be placed by the bedside. The stretcher is made in a novel principle. It is in two lengthwise sections made to lace together, and owing to this arrangement the patient may be put into it without being first lifted from the bed. By the means of pulleys and straps then adjusted the sick person may be raised to the desired height above the bed and the bed made or changed or a new mattress introduced without any trouble.

A contrivance known as a back rest is welcomed by invalids. By means of it any bed is immediately converted into a luxurious, easy chair or couch. It is designed to support an invalid's back at any desired inclination while lying in bed; and by its use the piling up of pillows, that heat the body and become quickly displaced, is avoided, and the sick one has a firm, though elastic support against which to lean. The construction is simple, only a light metal frame, covered over with stout striped linen duck, that extends below the back and forms an apron, and with a ratchet underneath for adjusting the angle of inclination. There are no cross rails to press against the body. Some back rests have cane backs instead of the duck, some have side head rests for people too weak or too weary to read or take interest

in anything. The weight of the patient resting on the apron holds the back rest in place, and, if necessary, pillows may be placed over the duck covering to render it softer.

"How is it that you think of all these little extra touches?" an inventor was asked, as he showed the workings by which the arm of a rolling chair took itself out of the way when not wanted.

"My invalids give me the hint," was the answer. "I spend a great deal of time with sick and deformed people. I talk with them and try to get at what they want most to complete their comfort. Very often they cannot put their wants into words, but I watch them closely and notice the discrepancies in such appliance and furniture as they have. In my twenty-five years of experience I have had wealthy patrons willing to spend any amount within reason in procuring some convenience that they had set their heart on. Generally I fail to make the thing that I set out to the first time I try. It turns out a good thing, maybe, a big improvement on what took its place before, or even an innovation, but it does not carry out my idea in all respects. I watch its practical use, see it used by a half dozen or more differently afflicted people, and make up my mind what the drawback is. Very likely," he added, laughing, "it is easier to discover the drawback than to remedy it, but with patience and additional improvements tacked on from time to time it gets in shape. Now, that chair with one arm that you see there. A young Southern woman gave me that idea. She is a poor little, shrunken creature, with the mind and heart of a woman and a well-shaped head and body, but her lower limbs were no bigger than a 5 year-old child's. 'The arm is always a bother when they lift me into my chair,' she said. 'I think if the chair had only one arm it would be better.' I told her that both arms were needed in a rolling chair for protection and as a rest for the hands, but that I would devise a chair with arms to lift back out of the way. She then suggested that if the back wheels were lower it would facilitate the lifting in and out also. I put both these ideas into execution as promptly as possible. It was a man who prompted my making a chair in which the invalid could ride with his legs extended, a feature new in chairs for outside use."

My patrons are my friends, and yet they are my business clients also. I have photographs of a number of people, both adults and children, who insist that I am their best friend, yet who have certainly paid me for every favor that I ever did for them. I sometimes think that my services are even more personal than a physician's, because of a more lasting character. As the invalid grows weaker or stronger, changes must be made in the appurtenances he uses and the rolling or reclining chair that he lives in, then he appeals to me."

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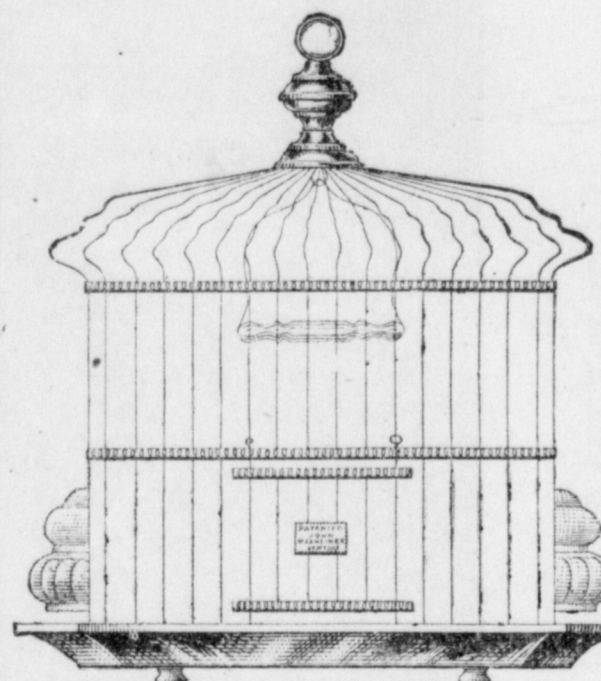
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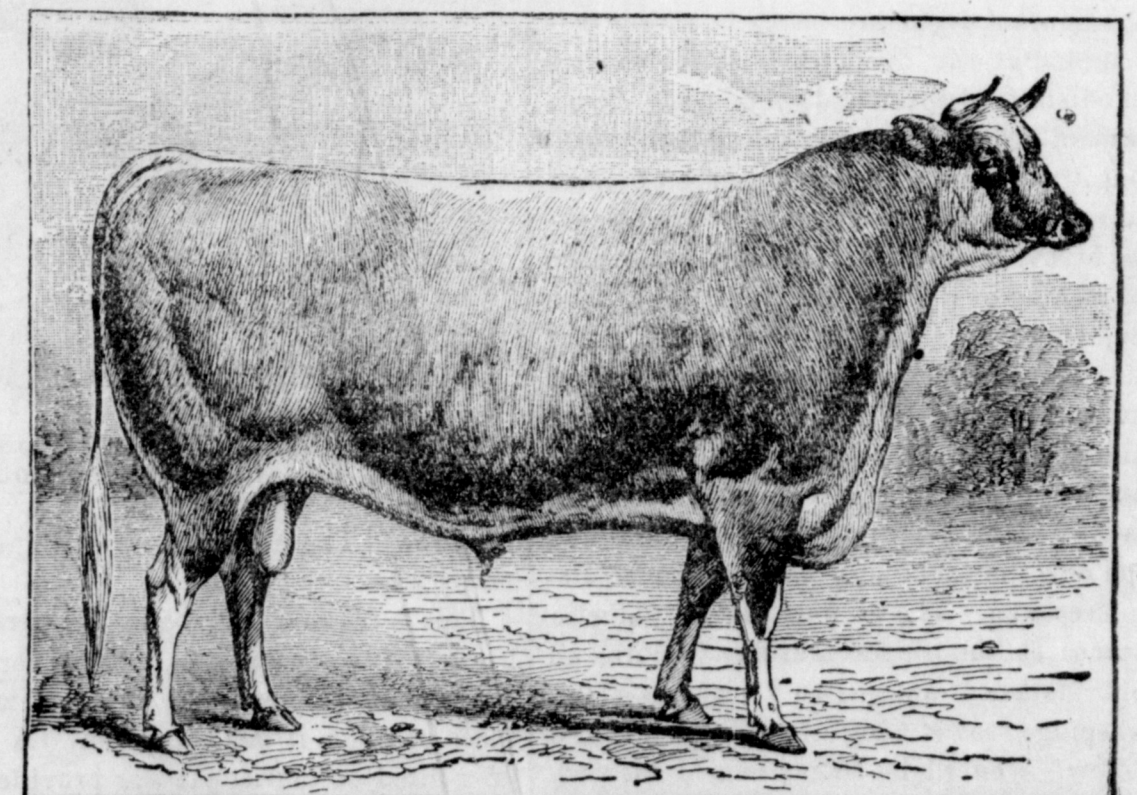
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