

## Inventions

February 13, 1924

I like all kinds of technical inventions, not because they seem logical to me, but because they fascinate me beyond all belief. I don't like them in the sense that an expert, or an American, likes them; I like them the way a savage would; I like them as wondrous, mysterious and incomprehensible things. I like the telephone because it provides a person with all sorts of experiences, as when the operator connects you with the wrong party by mistake and you heartily greet that party with "Listen, you big ox," or something similar; I like the streetcar because it is unpredictable, whereas going on foot is utterly predictable and lacking in adventure. I acquired an American coke stove because it demands so much caution and constant personal attention, as if I had an Indian elephant or an Australian kangaroo in my house. So now I have acquired a Swedish vacuum cleaner. I don't know but what you could say that the Swedish vacuum cleaner acquired me.

The man who introduced me to it and forced it on me, said that inside the cylinder is a motor; he was probably right, because when I turn it on, it makes as much racket as a factory. Along with it I acquired a cord and all sorts of tubes and extensions, maybe ten pieces in all; you can play with it like a Meccano set. This cord is pushed into an electrical outlet, and the other end travels across the floor or wherever you want it to go; at the same time the cylinder howls like a steam lathe, and it is this howling which heats it up. As you see, it is enormously simple. And afterwards, aha, I nearly forgot the main point; inside this cylinder is a small pouch, and afterwards, this is taken out and shaken over a piece of newspaper; and after that, a person can only say "I can't believe it," and "I must be mad," and call everyone in the whole house to come see how much dust came out of that pouch. I assure you, the astonishment of those present is the chief pleasure in owning a vacuum cleaner and it will afford you priceless satisfaction daily.

Up to now I believed in a whole range of things: in the Good Lord, in universal moral law, in atomic theory and other things more or less inaccessible to human understanding. Now I am compelled as well to believe in Swedish

vacuum cleaners. I am even compelled to believe absolutely in the metaphysical, ubiquitous and extraordinary presence of dust. I now believe that dust I am and to dust I shall return, and furthermore that I am now in the continuous process of returning to dust. I think that I scatter dust wherever I walk or sit. I think that even as I write this, a small pile of dust is coming into existence under my chair. My thoughts descend to the floor in something like a rich gray dust. If I speak, dust pours like lies from my mouth, even when I speak the holiest of truths. Everything is turning to dust. Otherwise it is not possible to explain the existence, the quantity and the first-class consistency of the dust in my vacuum cleaner. In that enchanted pouch, rather.

Every belief and every idol requires certain ritualistic ceremonies. Ever since I have been serving <sup>The</sup> Vacuum Cleaner, a ritual ceremony takes place at my house each morning: Shaking Out the Pouch. It's very similar to when a parlor magician shakes a dozen glasses out of his sleeve, or, from a hat, a rabbit, a sheaf of paper and a live girl; it is, in short, magic. You shake out the pouch in a more or less ritualistic fashion and anxiously lift it aside; a pile of dust appears; as I say, it is sheer sorcery. Dust from the Vacuum Cleaner isn't dirty, ordinary dust; it is dense, uniform, heavy and mysterious; it is conjured, in some way or other, for you never understand how so much dust gets in there.

If it so happens that the pile of dust is smallish, you are instantly alarmed; no doubt heathens likewise are alarmed when their idol refuses to devour an offering. As far as you are concerned, it is a matter of faith and even ambition, of a sort, that the pile of dust be large. You search for some forgotten corner where there is still some secret and unexploited dust. If you weren't too bashful, you'd go out and suck up dust from the street, in order to pay homage to your idol. When you are off visiting somewhere, you envy those people with beautiful, un-vacuumed dust. I think I'll begin secretly bringing dust back to the house with me, as I've probably extracted the last pinch of it at home.

As I say, I have an awesome reverence for technical inventions. If I had the money, I would buy in addition a three-stage <sup>internal combustion engine</sup> motor and a threshing machine, and maybe even a roller for rolling plate-glass windows. Or that machine which makes matchboxes. Meanwhile I have only an American coke stove and a Swedish vacuum cleaner; but even these two idols I serve in continuing wonder. Not long ago, the coke stove ran for fourteen days in a row, and you should have seen the amount of dust in the pouch yesterday. It was splendid.