

A STORY OF PRIVATE INITIATIVE AND LOCAL CAPITAL

Chapter V

THE PASSING OF THE WASH BOARD

MOST OF US can easily remember the "good old days" before the War when hobbleskirts made walking all but impossible. When elaborate feathers drooped fetchingly from every feminine hat. When the turkey trot was the dance of the hour. When moving picture houses were nickelodeons.

Today we laugh at these picturesque mannerisms of twenty years ago. But there is another side of the scene that was no laughing matter. Every Monday was a Blue Monday. Women got up at dawn. Clothes had been put to soak the night before. Hot steam clouded the basement. Backs were bent, knuckles bruised, over scrub boards. It was afternoon before the complete washing was out blowing on the line.

Those were the days when electric service was still nothing but a lighting service.

Small wonder, then, over the interest that followed the news that an electric washing machine had been invented! Its wooden tub sprouted a maze of belts and levers and gadgets. But crude as it was, it promised welcome relief from washday drudgery. In communities where electric service lasted only from five o'clock in the evening until eleven at night, special service was provided for Monday morning. Electricity began to do more than give light. *It began to ease the homemaker's burden.*

At the same time, ironing-day underwent a big change. No longer was it necessary to line up half a dozen "sad-irons" on the fire.

To replace these came the electric iron. Then the "mangle". And soon the mangle became the power ironer when it was improved to handle more than large flat pieces. Today one can sit down and guide most of the washing over its heated roller.

Gas-heated cabinet driers were developed to make it easy to dry clothes in the basement, rain or shine. Convenient ways of heating water—lots of it—were introduced. Washing machines were improved again and again, like automobiles, until today they bear little resemblance to the early models.

Sponsoring, developing and improving labor-saving appliances for northern Illinois homes has been another job undertaken by the Public Service Company. For years the Company has acted as a sort of *liaison* between its customers and manufacturers of household equipment. It has carefully tested the appliances it sells in its stores—has fortified their operation with an unqualified guarantee. Where servicing or replacement has been necessary, the customer has always found the Company ready and more than willing. It has studied the experiences of customers using appliances and in many instances has laid specific requirements for improvement before the manufacturers.

In all these efforts the Public Service Company has been trying to make it easier for electricity and gas to do the routine tasks of keeping house—to give women more leisure for enjoying the new freedom this generation offers.

PUBLIC SERVICE COMPANY OF NORTHERN ILLINOIS

This is the fifth of a series of stories chronicling the development of the Public Service Company of Northern Illinois and the service it is bringing to the area into which Chicago is growing. Copies of previous chapters will be mailed you if you will write to the Company, 72 West Adams Street, Chicago

TWO DECADES IN THE SERVICE OF NORTHERN ILLINOIS