

ON CHOOSING HOUSE AND HOME.

"There is a land, of every land the pride,
Beloved by Heaven o'er all the world beside;
There is a spot of earth supremely blest,
A dearer, sweeter spot than all the rest.

Where may that land, that spot of earth be found?
Art thou a man—a patriot—look around!
Oh! thou shalt find, howe'er thy footsteps roam,
That land thy country, and that spot thy home."



WERE mine the panegyrical instead of the purely practical, I could afford at this present moment to wax encomiastic, perhaps even to drift into verse, at the bare mention of that sweet word "home." To the ears of a true Englishman there is a charm about it that foreigners fail to appreciate.

Hardly is there a writer or poet who has not eulogised the *domus sua cuique tutissimum refugium*.

A house, a home of some kind, every one of us must have—a home for retirement, repose, and love. Can we not all remember how we clung to our first home, to our old home, more tenderly than ever bird to mother's nest, till tie after tie was sundered, till chord by chord was snapped, and we found ourselves in the world alone? Then other dear ties were formed, and we found ourselves, perhaps, in the responsible position of a husband and father, and head of a house.

Now the large majority of people in this world are not, strange to say, born with silver spoons in their mouths; they have to work hard for their daily bread, with subtle brains or lissom fingers; to such as these the choice of a house and home is of vital importance. I shall take it for granted, therefore, that the reader is a person of limited income, and that he wishes to take a house and "settle down," as it is termed. Even for a single man, to have a house of his own, however small and humble, is, in my opinion, much to be preferred to living in lodgings; but if he is married, why, then a house becomes an absolute necessity, if he would see his wife and family happy and comfortable—that is, completely so, for there are always some drawbacks to a life in lodgings.

The only things to be said in favour of "apartments," indeed, are that you yourself are not bothered paying taxes, and that your wife has less trouble with household matters and servants, and therefore more time to spend in your company. But I believe I am right in saying that there are few ladies who would not *much* rather be mistresses in their own houses. Indeed, the wish to have a house and home is inherent in the breast of womankind, and we see the budding desire displayed even in the child-woman, who, if her

parents be in good circumstances, must have doll and doll's house, and doll's furniture; and if they be poor she must have the house all the same, even if she builds it of mud, with oyster-shells by way of delf, and a dear kitten for a doll.

Now some may say, "Why need I be so very particular about the choice of a house? If I do not like it, I can leave it." Yes, so you can; but I can tell you from experience that there is no more troublesome, tiresome, and expensive occupation in the world than that of "fitting," as the Scotch call it; and it is better to remain in lodgings for months, or even years, until you find a good place to suit you, than to rush into a house without sufficient inquiry into its merits and demerits.

The first question to ask yourself, then, before you begin to look around you even, is "How much rent can I afford to pay for suitable accommodation?" And while thinking of the rent don't forget the taxes. It is far the best way to calculate for the rent and taxes as one sum, and put by for them. If you do so, you will never look upon the tax-gatherer as a very disagreeable person, who only wants to rob you, and comes swooping down upon you hawk-like, at the very moment when he is least expected.

Having made up your mind as to the rent you can afford—*easily*, mind you—you can begin to look out for a house. You can do this either through the public prints, or a respectable house-agent. If your income is an annuity, and there is no necessity for being near to business, you will very likely make choice of the country. Your taste may take you to some rural home, some miles perhaps from village or town, and in this case let me remind you that there is the item of carriage for parcels, &c., to be thought of and added to your outlay, and even were it but at the rate of ninepence a day—which is a moderate computation—it comes to something at the year's end.

My advice, then, is to apply to a few respectable agents in the neighbourhood of the place where you wish to reside, state your requirements in black and white, and leave them to look out for you. As soon as you get word of a place that is likely to suit you, pay the house a visit. And now happy are you if the nature and source of your income does not confine you to any particular place, village or town in the kingdom, for in that case you are free to choose a locality which is likely in all respects to be a healthy one, and one conducive to longevity. But what, you may ask me, must be your guide in such a choice?

Well, it is surely not difficult to find out what kind of climate, whether bracing, relaxing, or sedative, may suit your constitution, and there are plenty of places of all sorts in these islands. As a rule, I should not

advise a continuous residence at the sea-side to any except the very robust. Much better is it for one to live inland, where there is the pleasant shelter and shade of trees, and, letting one's house to a quiet tenant in the autumn, journey wherever one listeth.

Many people, especially retired army, navy, or city men, make up their minds to dwell in the quietest part of the country. Buffeted about for years by the waves of an active life, deafened and tired by the din and turmoil of cities, their dreams have long been of peace in some rural spot; and as soon as they are free they seek, and mayhap find, a place to suit them, take a lease of a house, and so bury themselves alive. They soon find that they have avoided Scylla only to fall into Charybdis, not having taken into account the fact that to a man who has spent the greater part of his life in activity, the humdrum obscurity of a rural existence is positively incompatible either with happiness or long life. If you do retire to quiet life in the country, then be at least but a reasonable distance from some respectable town, where now and again you may enjoy the useful stimulant of witnessing the world go round.

Remember that the *soil* on which your house is built will have much to do with the measure of health that shall fall to your lot. Clayey or marly soils ought to be avoided, so also should those of stone or sand. The former are very unhealthy because they permit water to lodge on their surfaces, wet meadows, woods, and marshes are the consequences, malaria and *malaise* the result. Sandy soils, again, heat soon and cool quickly; rain or dew is absorbed by them, and again exhaled during the heat of the day in vapour of a most pestilential nature.

The most healthy of all soils is the gravelly; owing to their easy drainage they prevent the growth of that peculiar vegetation, or disease-germ, which is included when we mention that terrible term "malaria." The higher the situation, too, the better. Next in healthiness, as a site for a house, is the chalk soil. It, also, readily absorbs water, but, unlike the sandy or stony soil, it does not return it again to the atmosphere.

Those, however, who are still in business, who have still to bear the burden and the heat of the day, ought to take houses at a convenient distance from their offices or places of daily resort; and they will do well, moreover, to see that their residences are not very far from respectable shops, where articles of grocery may be purchased as pure and free from adulteration as the age of the world will permit.

Before you enter a house that you have some thoughts of taking, do not fail to take a look, not only at the exterior thereof, but at the neighbourhood around it. Do not, however, be too much struck with a showy outside; the place may be but a whited sepulchre after all—a very living grave. The house, too, may be in itself, both outside and in, everything which heart can desire, but after all it may be situated in the vicinity of other houses, either at the back or front, the conduct of the inmates of which may render your life wretched. Your rooms may be furnished

with taste and comfort, but if you are awakened every other night by the sounds of drunken revelry, or mayhap fighting and squabbling, your life will not be a very romantic one, to say the least. Again, however tastefully your garden may be gotten up, however shady and cool your summer-house, the sound of voices in altercation, or perhaps oaths and swearing, floating over the adjoining wall, will detract materially from the pleasure you derive from the society of a friend, or favourite author.

Having satisfied yourself regarding externals, it will be time now to have a peep inside, and the very first thing that it is your duty to find out is whether the house be *damp* or *dry*. Nothing can be more injurious to the health than residence in a house which is damp; coughs and colds, aches and pains and rheums—ay, and maybe fever itself—must be your portion if you are unwise enough to live in a damp house, and, granting even that you have the strongest of constitutions, dampness will sap it, your nerves will be weakened, you shall find yourself ill and fretful without being able to assign a cause. Avoid a damp house, therefore: you can hardly fail to know if it is damp. Suspicious spots of mildew about the paper, beading on unpapered walls, and a generally moist smell must guide you in your diagnosis.

More deadly even than damp are the emanations from drains and cesspools, and noxious gases, such as sulphuretted hydrogen and carbonic acid. If you mean to live for any length of time in a house, it will be much better to put the matter into the hands of a trustworthy surveyor, and let him see to it.

Now good groceries and good butcher's meat are, no doubt, very essential to the well-being of all of us, but there are two things which are even more important; I allude to sunlight and fresh air. Never take a house that cannot be freely thrown open to the inlet of both these requisites to health and happiness. Food and air, and food and air; but I assure you, reader, that folks nowadays take a vast deal too much of the former, and not half enough of the latter.

Before choosing a house, one would do well to read an account of two terrible episodes in English history: first, the tale of the Black Hole in Calcutta. You may read it in any history of the British Empire in India, and if that sad narrative does not convince you of the value of fresh air, I do not know of anything else at all likely to. Secondly, read, or think of it if you have already read it, the tale of the destruction of nearly the whole of the British army, some 40,000 strong, on the sandy plains of Walcheren. This story ought surely to impress upon one's memory the fact, that a gravel soil is slightly more wholesome than a sandy or stony one.

Having made sure, then, that the house is not damp, nor poisoned by noxious vapours, your next inquiry must be directed to the quantity and quality of the water. Articles on the value of pure water have already appeared in the columns of this Magazine; I may only remind you, therefore, that the water-supply is of the utmost importance, and should never be overlooked on any account.

Perhaps there is nothing more trying to the tempers, to say nothing of the constitutions of the inmates of a house, than smoky chimneys. It is bad enough to have smoke in our towns out of doors; it is shocking to be boxed up with it in a room, perhaps, where the vents obstinately refuse to draw without a coaxing arrangement of open doors and let-down windows. See, then, that the chimneys of your proposed house do their duty cheerily, and without any undue fastidiousness.

After having had an eye to the state of the chimneys, you will next have to take into consideration the state of repair the house is in. If you are satisfied with the house in every other way, I should advise you to go thoroughly over it, in a business-like fashion, notebook in hand, and take an inventory of the portions of doors, or windows, or walls that want seeing to; and, before taking the house, see with your own eyes that the landlord has made good every defect. He will do so, in all likelihood, cheerfully enough before you have agreed to take the house; but if you have foolishly entered, on his bare promise, most likely he will look twice at his money before he spends it for your benefit. This is human nature.

Now, when once fairly settled down in your new home, you will not be long in finding out the truth of the saying that an Englishman's house is his castle. You will naturally, therefore, do all you can to have it comfortably and tastefully furnished. It is not in my province, however, to inform you how to do this; but one truth, now generally recognised by the medical profession, I deem it my duty to bring before you: *the very contact, morally speaking, of clean and tasteful surroundings, carries with it a certain tonic which tends to length of days.* Who shall compute, for instance, the amount of good that may not be effected by the presence of even flowers all about one's room, or the possession of a neat garden?—this latter, indeed, I consider essential to *my* existence, at least. And flowers require but little care, after all; roses climb kindly around one's cottage door, creepers need but little encouragement to trail around the arbour, feathery ferns will grow on flint heaps in any odd corner; well, and if you have a tent on your little lawn, and a netted hammock for summer lounging, with book and pipe, or cup of tea—if you have these, I say, then indeed you might go farther and fare worse.

HARVEST SONG.

I.

THE wind blows in at early morn
 Across the rippling sea,
 And dances along o'er the rustling corn,
 That welcomes it lovingly.
 Ah, summer breeze, caress while you may!
 Bees, linger with your humming!
 For the golden grain will be gathered to-day,
 The harvesters are coming!

E'en now you may hear their joyous shout
 Far down in the shady lane,
 Where the little brook winds in and out,
 And hides and peeps forth again.
 See now they are passing the lowing herds,
 And the pool where darts the swallow,
 And their song wafts up with the song of birds,
 Right down from the leafy hollow:

“Hurrah for the work begun!
 Hurrah for the golden grain!
 Hurrah for the ripening sun!
 Hurrah for the fresh'ning rain!
 Hurrah for the work begun!
 Hurrah for the golden grain!”

II.

The wind blows in at eve again,
 Across the shimmering sea,
 But seeks in vain for the rustling grain
 It had wooed so lovingly;
 For the corn is cut, and the golden sheaves
 Lie heaped in the cliff-side meadow,
 So it passes on to the nodding leaves,
 And dallies with them in the shadow.

And now once more the joyous words
 Ring out o'er the sun-lit sea,
 And with ripple of waves and lay of birds
 Make sweetest melody.
 For toil is o'er, and a thankful song
 From every heart is springing,
 And the workers' words seem to linger long,
 And still you can hear them singing:

“Hurrah for good work done!
 Hurrah for the golden grain!
 Hurrah for the ripening sun!
 Hurrah for the fresh'ning rain!
 Hurrah for good work done!
 Hurrah for the golden grain!”

G. WEATHERLY.

