

HOW TO CHOOSE A NEW HOUSE.

IN TWO PAPERS.

CHAPTER THE FIRST.



EAR DOROTHEA, — Your husband tells me that you and he believe that the time has now come for you to move; that you feel your family to be growing beyond its borders, and that you could do very well with one or two additional rooms. He says, also, that you want me, as a person of judgment and discretion who has been through removals in

her time, to give you, on one or two sheets of paper, the result of my twenty-five years' experience in the matter of choosing houses; and to state in detail what the intelligent house-hunter should look for, should guard against, and should bear in mind. With these notes in your hand you think that you will be prepared for the duty which lies before you.

I am flattered by your opinion of me, and amused by your request. Nevertheless, I will do what I can to comply with it, recognising while doing so the probability that you will disregard my wisdom. You remember the saying of the French philosopher that there are two sets of fools in this world: the first give advice, and the second don't take it. Maybe you and I are going to represent these two classes. If you were an ordinary person you would undoubtedly choose your house, not because it was substantially built, healthily situated, well drained, and judiciously planned, but because it had a pretty porch that took your fancy; or a large garden well stocked with fruit-trees which you thought would yield you abundant delight. I hope, however, you are not an ordinary person, otherwise having moved into the dwelling of your fancy, you would very shortly move out again. A pretty porch, a pleasant garden, and similar advantages are very well when the house belonging thereto is of a sort in which we can live healthily and comfortably; but they give no pleasure when we feel that in order to obtain them we have to endure many disadvantages.

If only people were more careful about choosing their houses, they would not surely move as frequently as they do. I am quite shocked to see how readily people move in these days. It is even said that there are householders in London who make a practice of changing their quarters every three years, and never take up their carpets in the interval. They enter a house, arrange that the landlord shall paper and paint as much as he will, and do it up for their reception, then leave it when the first freshness is worn off, taking another which has been done up in the same way. To my mind, there is something almost horrible in this kind of thing. A house changed thus cannot be a home. The sacredness of a home consists very

much in its associations. If in going over your domicile you can say, "In this room, my husband, our friends, and I have broken bread, rested, and refreshed ourselves for years; this room was my children's nursery, this was their schoolroom; this was the window upon which my husband has given the signal which told us it was he and not a stranger who knocked at the door," and so on, you learn to love the place. Moreover, when we settle in a house, we have pleasure in making it pretty according to our own ideas. We give it the stamp of our own individuality. One does not care to spend time and money on a building which we expect to occupy only a few months; but if we intend to occupy it several years, we feel it worth while to make it attractive and comfortable.

In the house you now occupy, dear Dorothea, you have already pleasant associations. Your children were born there. Do I not remember that in the bedroom at the front, which looks over the garden, you showed me your first baby? How proud you were that day! You will never have the same association with a room in another house. You have made the place very charming, too. I have always admired the ingenuity which you displayed in converting that queer recess in the spare bedroom into a cupboard, by putting hooks into the wall and hanging curtains before it; also in turning the step at the end of the hall into a receptacle for boots and shoes, and so keeping these oddments out of sight; while the improvement you effected in turning the "lumber room" into an "observatory," has filled me with a respect for your capacity from which I have never recovered. You have friends in the neighbourhood; school and church are within easy distance; you have a pleasant little garden, and your rooms are bright and cheery. Do you know, dear, the first advice I feel inclined to give you, as I think about you removing, is the same as Punch's advice to people about to marry, "Don't."

Could you not think again of your resolve? Wherever you go there will be something you do not like. Probably there is not a householder now paying rent and taxes who is entirely satisfied with his dwelling-place, and who would not alter something if he could. In going farther you may fare worse. You talk glibly about "making a change" and "looking out for a larger house," but you do not know what a business a removal is. Depend upon it, the individual who laid down the axiom that "three removes are as bad as a fire," knew what she was talking about. Be sure she would have put up with one or two things before she would have made a change. A removal is so expensive a concern also. You never know where you are to begin to pay, or when you have finished paying. For people who want to economise there is no better method than that of staying where they are. "A rolling stone gathers no moss;" although it would scarcely be fair to call you and your husband rolling

stones when you have been so many years in your present house. You may think that with a little management you can soon be straight after a removal; and I have no doubt that you will manage as well as most folks; but it must be many weeks, if not months, before you are settled. Yet "settling" will simply mean that you are becoming reconciled to the drawbacks you have discovered.

If, however, you must go, if to make a change is inevitable, take a friend's advice and give yourself time to make a leisurely choice of your new abode. It is not at all easy to choose a new house wisely. One has to think of so many points, and in remembering one detail we are apt to overlook another. As I said just now, we never get everything we want in a house, and what we have to do is to be willing to sacrifice what is of less importance for the sake of what is of much importance. Give yourself plenty of time therefore, and before you begin to "hunt," spend a quiet hour in writing down in your pocket-book what you must have, what you ought to have, and what you would like to have. Under the heading of what you must have, you might state the number of rooms and closets that are indispensable; and furnish yourself with a memorandum that perfect drainage and other sanitary conditions are of supreme value. Under the heading of what you would like to have might be entered the pretty porch and the garden, mentioned just now; and it is even possible that a kitchen on the ground floor, or a bath-room with water laid on, would find a place here. In any case you may as well make up your mind that you will have to do without something; and if you carry your memoranda about with you, it will always be easy to glance at it in moments of enthusiasm after you have looked over a new house. There are few things more calculated to overbalance the judgment than the inspection of attractive details to which we are unaccustomed, and there are few things more calculated to restore the balance than to tie ourselves down to a memorandum book. "To pay ready money is a great check on the imagination," said Emerson. To consult memoranda is equally so.

I suppose you will adopt the usual plan of getting from a house agent a list of houses of the number of rooms that you want, in a neighbourhood that you like, and of a suitable rent. The plan is excellent, and saves much trouble. House-hunting is so very unpleasant, that we are justified in making it as little troublesome as we can.

One word I must say to you about the neighbourhood. Unless there is a specially good reason for seeking another, I think you would be wise to retain your present surroundings. You have friends near you now, and friends are much more easily lost than gained. People do not readily make friends when they are turned thirty. You deal with tradesmen whom you can trust, you know exactly where to turn to supply your needs, and you are respected by those with whom you have had dealings. If you voluntarily give up all these advantages, it will be a long time before they are yours again.

Having gone through your list and fixed on three

or four houses which suit you so far as accommodation and appearance are concerned, it next devolves upon you to examine each one with regard to position, drainage, aspect, and condition, in order that you may determine which one is to be preferred. It would be hard to say which of these is the most important. Taken together they go to make a house healthy; and to have a healthy house is an advantage greater than words can express. "In a healthy house," says Dr. Richardson, "disease will never be generated. It is a house into which, if disease be introduced, it will remain for the briefest possible period." When a house is not healthy, mothers may expend all their energies in trying to "build up" the family, yet the family will always be ailing. Grown-up folk will be irritable and lacking in energy; but the children will suffer the most. If they do not exhibit some serious disease such as diphtheria or consumption, they will be "rickety;" they will not thrive as they should do, they will have enlarged tonsils, and catch whatever childish complaints are going. On doctors and medicine the unfortunate father will have to spend treble the cost of a more sanitary dwelling, and the mother will be made miserable with nursing and anxiety. If only parents realised how necessary for the well-being of children it is that houses should be healthy, they would make enormous sacrifices and take infinite pains in order to secure this great good. Yet a sanitary authority declared not long ago, that there are still comparatively few dwelling-houses where the essentials to a healthy home exist.

Seeing then that the healthfulness of the house is so important, I hope, dear Dorothea, you will let me put down in a few words what I believe to be the facts with regard to the details I mentioned.

Position.—The position of a house includes the soil on which it is built, its situation, and the prospect it commands. A damp soil is always dangerous. It is likely to cause rheumatism, consumption, neuralgia, cholera, dysentery, and in children, tonsillitis. "Made soils" are also bad. Properly they ought not to be built on for three or four years after they are formed, yet we constantly see, especially in towns, rubbish being carted to a piece of waste ground, and building operations at once commenced. It would be difficult to say how much disease is produced in this way.

Inexperienced people often speak as if clay soil were always injurious, and sandy soil were always good. This is not, however, invariably the case. Clay soil that is fairly drained, is fairly healthy; and sandy soil that is near a cesspool is very unhealthy, because the lightness of the soil enables the poison to travel through it. The most desirable soils are granite, chalk, sandstones, deep high-lying gravel, and stiff well-drained clay. The worst are made soils, undrained clay, stiff marly and alluvial soils. Limestone is good when free from marsh, and sand when deep and free from animal or vegetable matter.

As to position, there is much difference of opinion, and a good many hints may be gleaned from experience. Houses which are placed on a very steep slope with a hill at the back are apt to have smoky

chimneys, and also to be damp. Also, if not most substantially built, they are liable to "settle" after frost and rain—"to settle" in this connection meaning to get cracks in the walls, so that doors will not open and locks will not fasten. The bottom of a hill is always to be avoided. It is easily reached, but it is very likely to be damp, because all the water runs into it, and in hot weather it is uncomfortable because no air seems to get to it. Yet an old writer tells us that "when choosing a house, we should chiefly choose a wholesome air, for air is a dish one feeds on every minute, therefore it need be good." The top of a hill is bracing but very trying, exposed to wind and weather. People who are asthmatic or whose hearts are affected ought not to have to mount a hill. The best situation is the gentle slope of a hill, and the nearer the top the better so long as shelter may be obtained. A great authority in building has said that "the perfection of situation is the slope of a not too steep hill, facing between south-south-east and south-west; high enough to get a good fall for drainage, and to be quite free from the miasma of the lower land; low enough to secure thorough protection from the cold winds of the east and the north." "The direction of the prevailing winds near a house," another authority says, "can frequently be detected by observing the way in which

the trees and the shrubs in the neighbourhood are grown. They will generally be found to indicate by their shape the direction of the prevailing wind. The continued pressure of winds in one direction will bend the trees in one way, and the young twigs and leaves on the side on which the wind most frequently impinges get damaged and destroyed more frequently than those on the other side, where the trees are able consequently to grow more freely."

For the rest we might remember old Thomas Fuller's saying, "A pleasant prospect is always to be respected. A medley view, such as of water and land at Greenwich, best entertains the eyes, refreshing the wearied beholder with exchange of objects. Yet I know a more profitable prospect, where the owner can only see his own land round about."

Drainage is the next consideration, but I must leave that for another letter. It is so important and so little understood that it ought to be respectfully studied; and we should indeed make a mistake if we put it in the fag end of a letter. I will continue my discourse in a few weeks, and I sincerely hope you will be as interested in reading as I have been in writing.

Believe me, dear, affectionately yours,

PHYLIS BROWNE.

MY MONGREL : THE STORY OF A LOST DOG.

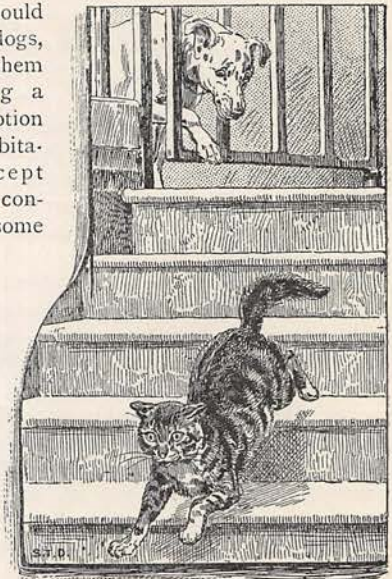


MY MONGREL AT THE BUTCHER'S.

dogs are sent to the "Home" at Battersea, where, if not claimed by their owners, they are either sold or put to a painless death; while such lost dogs as do not appear at Battersea are regarded as stolen, either to be returned, if a reward is offered, or exported to another district.

FEW people, probably, except those who have themselves made search for a lost dog, are aware of the large number of canine waifs and strays which may be heard of and traced by a diligent inquirer in almost any quarter of London. It is generally supposed that the majority of lost

Some recent experience, however, has opened my eyes to the fact that, quite apart from these two recognised classes, there is a large floating population of lost dogs—or perhaps it should be said *found* dogs, since most of them are undergoing a course of adoption into new habitations. Except during the continuance of some special crusade against stray dogs, the police are not particularly active in effecting the arrest of "vagrants"; and numbers of dogs find temporary and then permanent



"POOR PUSSY."

him takes possession of me. I cannot bear he should think I intentionally enticed another woman's lover away from her.

"Mr. Fane, it wasn't my fault about the train, and I was very unhappy when I found I was left behind with Mr. Richard Fane."

The words are out before I have time to weigh their meaning. But directly they have left my lips I wish them unsaid, and my face grows crimson with mortification. How silly he will think me!

But if he thinks me silly, he does not say so.

"Richard ought to be ashamed of himself," is all he mutters, under his breath.

Then I know that he no longer blames me in his heart for what has occurred.

When we reach the Manor House he lifts me down from the dog-cart as if I were a child.

"Drenched through," he murmurs, as he deposits me on the doorstep. "Here, Mrs. Morrison," he says, addressing the housekeeper, "just see that Miss Vesey changes all her things, and give her something hot to drink at once."

I feel younger than ever as Mrs. Morrison takes possession of me; but now I am a happy little girl, instead of a miserable one. I will never again believe that Mr. Fane is cold and unfeeling: no, not even

when he makes one of his long pauses before replying to some question of mine, and seems to be looking me through and through with lofty disapproval.

My happiness, however, is short-lived, and collapses suddenly on the morning after Gracie and Mr. Fane leave the Manor, the former to stay with her friends at Drislington, and the latter to transact his business in London.

"You will be sure to write directly you arrive, Gracie," were almost my last words to her, "and then I shall get the letter first thing the following morning."

Gracie promised faithfully that she would do so. Judge then my surprise when the post, instead of bringing me a letter from Gracie, brought one addressed to Gracie in her hostess' handwriting.

I hesitate long. Shall I open it? Possibly it ought to have reached a post or two earlier, and is to ask Gracie to bring something with her which I can now forward.

Then I break the seal. The first sentence strikes terror into my heart: "We are so bitterly disappointed you have not come. Surely there cannot have been any mistake about the date."

END OF CHAPTER THE NINTH.

HOW TO CHOOSE A NEW HOUSE.

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CHAPTER THE SECOND.

DEAR DOROTHEA,—Once more I address you on the interesting subject of how to choose a house.

Drainage.—The position of the house you think of taking being approved, the next thing to be considered is the drainage. It is astonishing how much ignorance prevails on this subject, and also how impatient people become when drainage is mentioned. One lesson, however, which I have learnt in my twenty-five years' experience of housekeeping, is that though there are numbers of individuals who ought to understand the subject, and who profess to understand it, yet there are very few indeed who do actually and thoroughly understand it. Probably a chief reason why householders are impatient when drainage is mentioned, is that they have been so often taken in about it; and they think that if they pay the slightest heed to warnings about "something wrong," they will find themselves landed in a good deal of upset and annoyance, have a large bill to pay, and have nothing to show for all their trouble. Nothing to show! There will be something to show if we live in a house where drainage is defective: we shall open the door to danger and disease, and we shall be making arrangements to lose, not merely money, but our living treasures. Individuals who insist upon houses being

properly drained are not wild lunatics, though they are often credited with being so; they speak the words of truth and soberness.

The fact is, that if there is one detail with regard to which it is not safe to aim at "doing things cheaply" it is with regard to drainage. The average builder, the average plumber, the average handy man, all are entirely incompetent to decide whether or not the drainage of a house is perfect. What is wanted is the opinion of a respectable, educated professional expert, an architect, or a sanitary surveyor. If an individual thus qualified be engaged as a matter of business to go through the house, examine it carefully, then give a written statement as to its sanitary arrangements, the householder will be as safe as human forethought can make him.

If I were acting for you and your husband, dear Dorothea, I would not even think of an agreement, or allow myself to imagine the conditions of tenancy, until I had ground to feel satisfied on this point. Even supposing things are wrong, while a house is empty they may easily be set right. It is the landlord's business to put them right; and he will be much more likely to take the necessary steps when he has the hope of a good tenant than he will be after the tenant is committed to the tenancy. Moreover, it is much easier to put drains right when a house is empty than

when it is occupied. Whether easy or difficult, however, on this point you should be firm. If the landlord will have no inspection, but contents himself with saying that "the drains are all right; he has paid large sums to have them made so, and knows they are," give up all idea of renting that dwelling. If he is reasonable, arrange for the house to be duly inspected, and pay your guinea for the business without grudging it. A guinea paid now may prevent untold disaster in the future. But in any case have it understood that should it be necessary to make alterations, the work is not to be considered complete until the professional expert who pronounced the drains imperfect has declared them to be satisfactory. To allow the builder who has made the alterations to pass them as perfect is to submit to a mockery.

Perhaps you do not know that where drains run underneath a house (a condition of things much to be deprecated, but which unfortunately prevails extensively in towns and old houses) there is a way of finding out whether they are defective which you might adopt on your own account. If disposed to experiment in this direction, you should buy of any good druggist six-pennyworth of the strongest oil of peppermint procurable. Now look carefully round the walls of the house on the outside, and in some convenient out-of-the-way place you will be sure to find a square hole with a trap, which is the opening of the drain. Pour the peppermint down this drain outside the house, then go inside the house and shut the doors. If after a few minutes there is a smell of peppermint in the house, there is reason to believe that the drainage is imperfect, and that there is a defect somewhere. Where the odour of peppermint can penetrate, sewer gas can penetrate, and though the one is harmless the other is poisonous. This test is rather a rough one, but it is tolerably certain. If the peppermint can be smelt inside the house a minute or so after it has been poured into the drain outside the house, there is abundant cause for uneasiness.

Even when the drainage of a house is all that it should be, householders have occasionally to complain that there is a bad smell outside the door. One way to prevent this annoyance is to avoid a house which has a sewer-flap in the pavement in front. Also if there is a choice it is wise not to occupy a house just opposite the small holes in the road by which sewers are ventilated. If there is a bad smell anywhere in a street it is almost sure to come from these holes, and in dry weather this nuisance can be smelt, as unmistakably as in frosty weather it can be seen.

Aspect.—When drainage is pronounced satisfactory, aspect has next to be considered. On the aspect of the house depends your getting plenty of sunshine and fresh air. Women, I am sure, do not sufficiently value sunshine. If the sun shines brightly into their rooms, they run to draw down the blinds and let down the curtains, for fear carpets or chair-covers should fade. They would be wiser to let the carpets fade rather than to keep out the sun, for furniture cannot be sweet and wholesome when the sun cannot get to it, and "life without sunlight is only half living." If we wish

plants to thrive we put them in a sunny place; we know that if we set them in the shade they would pine and be weakly. Human beings are very much like plants. Dr. Richardson said a little while ago, "I once found by experiment that certain organic poisons, analogous to the poisons which propagate contagious diseases, are rendered innocuous by exposure to light." And in her "Notes on Nursing," Miss Nightingale makes some remarks about sunlight which ought to be read by everyone who is about to choose a house. I will copy them for your benefit.

"Second only to fresh air, I should be inclined to rank light in importance for the sick. Direct sunlight, not only daylight, is necessary for speedy recovery, except in a small number of cases. Instances could be given, almost endless, where in dark wards or in wards with a northern aspect, even when thoroughly warmed, or the wards with borrowed light when thoroughly ventilated, the sick could not by any means be made speedily to recover.

"Who has not observed the purifying effect of light, and especially sunlight, upon the air of a room? Here is an observation within everyone's experience. Go into a room where the shutters are always shut (in a sick-room or a bed-room there should never be shutters shut), and though the room be uninhabited, though the air has never been polluted by the breathing of human beings, you will observe a close musty smell of corrupt air, of air that is unpurified by the effect of the sun's rays. The mustiness of dark rooms and corners is indeed proverbial. The cheerfulness of a room, the usefulness of light in treating disease is proverbial.

"'Where there is sun, there is thought.' All physiology goes to confirm this. Where is the shady side of deep valleys?—there is cretinism. Where are cellars and the unshaded sides of narrow streets?—there is degeneracy and weakness of the human race—mind and body equally degenerating. Put the pale withering plant and human being into the sun, and if not too far gone each will recover health and spirit.

"It is a curious thing to observe how almost all patients lie with their faces turned towards the light, exactly as plants always make their way towards the light. A patient will even complain that it gives him pain lying on that side. 'Then why do you lie on that side?' He does not know, but we do. It is because it is the side towards the window."

To the same effect has spoken another lady sanitary authority, Mrs. Buckton, of Leeds. In her book "Health in the House," this lady says:—

"The Rev. J. H. F. Kendale, of Leeds, told me he once suffered from a sore throat for several months; no medicine did him any good. At last it occurred to him that the room he always sat in got no sun. He removed into another room upon which the sun was constantly shining. In a very short time he lost his sore throat."

Valuable though sunshine is, we ought to diffuse it judiciously, and we need it in some rooms and at some hours more than others. This is what twenty-five years' experience, observation, reflection, and inquiry have taught me about light.

The dining, living, and nursery rooms are wanted to be cool in summer. If they caught the hot afternoon sun they would be unbearable in the summer-time. Therefore living-rooms should not look west, or even south, if this can be helped. As old Thomas Fuller says, "A south window in summer is a chimney with a fire in it, and needs the screen of a curtain. In a west window in summer-time, towards night, the sun grows low, and over-familiar with more light than delight." The breakfast-room, on the other hand, should be on the east or south-east side of the house, because it is desirable that these apartments should have the morning sun. "An east window welcomes the infant beams of the sun before they are of any strength to do any harm, and is offensive to none but a sluggard." A library, however, should have a west aspect, because it is likely to be used most in winter and bad weather, when the sun's rays will be agreeable. A larder, on the other hand, should be on the cool side of the house, otherwise the provisions will not keep. "A north wind is best for butteries and cellars, for the beer will be sour if the sun smiles on it." Altogether we may accept the following summary of the situation:—

"A house with a northern aspect is very often damp and very often bleak and cold; a southerly aspect is as warm, dry, and bright as is to be had in the situation. An easterly aspect is cold, especially in the winter and spring, but as a rule tolerably dry. A westerly aspect is warm and inclined to damp, and likely to be exposed to wind and rain."

The *condition* of a house has much to do with its comfort. Before everything else it should not be damp, for "a damp house is a deadly house," says the proverb. Dampness is generally caused by faults of construction, and it is very difficult to cure. In looking over houses, therefore, I advise you to take careful note of the signs of damp; they are generally discernible enough before the house is done up. Mouldy dark

stains on the walls, and the marks of damp on the floor, should make you turn away from a house and never enter it more.

The arrangement of the bedrooms is a detail not to be overlooked in choosing a house. One can scarcely lay down a general rule about the aspect of bedrooms, because their number necessitates their being of all aspects. The great thing is that they should be well ventilated, and so planned that the bed may be placed somewhere else than between the window and the fire-place, or between the door and the fireplace, or between the door and the window. The door also should on no account be made to open full on the place where the bed will be. Forgetfulness of these small details causes great annoyance.

Such, dear Dorothea, are the suggestions I have to make concerning the choice of a house. I hope you will find them of service. If in addition to the excellencies mentioned you can arrange to have a pretty house, you will indeed be fortunate. But concerning appearance it is with houses as with faces, beauty is in the eye of the beholder, and what one would admire another would dislike; therefore in this respect you could scarcely do better than follow your taste. As, however, you think of going to a larger house than the one you now occupy, I might with advantage repeat the advice given by an author of two hundred and fifty years ago:—

"A house had better be too little for a day than too great for a year; for it is easier borrowing of thy neighbour a brace of chambers for a night than a bag of money for a twelvemonth."

Hoping that you will benefit by all the wise advice that has been given you, and that when you are settled in your new home I may be as warmly welcomed there as I have always been in your present home,

I am, dear Dorothea, affectionately yours,

PHYLLIS BROWNE.

WHEN MOTHER IS ILL.

WHAT should we do if mother were dead?"
That's the refrain that comes into my head;
For everything's wrong, and the house is so still,
And at sixes and sevens, now mother is ill.

Serious? No. But, then, don't you see,
Though not so for her, yet it is so for me;
For I've to be mother, and daughter, and maid,
And there's hardly enough for the three, I'm afraid.

It really *is* trying—the butcher's so slow:
He won't send the meat up in time, don't you know;

So the cook's out of temper from morning till night,
And declares there is nothing I order that's right.

Yet I work like a slave—ah, you laugh, but I do—
I pour out the coffee at breakfast for two,
Then I order the dinner, as mother was wont,
For I know how to cook—though the cook says I don't.

Then—out of my way—there's her bell—don't you hear?
And she wants me to take up her cocoa, poor dear;
Can't stop to shake hands—you must come again soon;
Shut the door very quietly—good afternoon.

J. T. BURTON WOLLASTON.

