

A MOVING STORY.

BY J. HALL RICHARDSON.

AWAITING THE ARRIVAL
OF THE FIRST VAN."UNCONSIDERED
TRIFLES."

"WHAT is the matter?"

My friend sat with his head buried in his hands, a look of grim despair upon his face, and his attitude generally suggestive of ill-fortune.

"Matter!" he echoed, "matter enough! I am in the middle of a move. It is the busy time, and at eight o'clock to-night the first van had still to arrive. Goodness knows when we shall be straight."

I smiled sympathetically but complacently. The truth was my own move was a week ahead, and I foolishly imagined that our arrangements were so complete that the prospect was quite rosy—a mere change of occupation and of

scene. I know much better now.

Let me look back calmly.

When did the idea of a move first disturb our small, but, until then, contented household? With whom did it originate? You must ask my wife. I should say she would perhaps admit that the first proposal to change our address was made when a certain spring clean revealed the alleged shortcomings of our home. I have myself a distinct recollection of contesting that suggestion, of putting it off, of treating it as a nightmare. But it was not to be shirked. I temporised with my wife, saying—

"A move is a serious business. Three moves, it is

said, are as bad as a fire. We may not be able to afford it. Let us wait, say, for a couple of years."

"On one condition," said she promptly—she had evidently thought over the question quietly—"and that is, at the end of the time we go into a larger house."

"I make no such bargain."

"Well, it isn't much use to move into a house of the same size. I would rather stop where I am," she exclaimed petulantly.

"Quite so, my dear."

But there! it was of no use to argue. My wife had made up her mind—not only to move, but to have a larger house, and she has not been disappointed.

We went house-hunting fully eighteen months before the expiration of the two years' truce; but I sternly refused to allow that period to be shortened. On the other hand, at times there were hopes—vain, alas!—that we should have to stay where we were.

I must have worn out two maps of London in searching for an ideal suburb having all the necessary conveniences and time tables, without discovering it. The metropolis is a huge place, but wait until you go on a house hunt, and then you will deem it insignificantly small.

When at last the neighbourhood was determined upon, certain building estates were explored. Of course we wanted a modern house; but the builders, since the failure of building societies, seemed to have entered into a league not to let their houses, but to sell them only to would-be tenants.

Some of these landlords were so off-hand as to refuse, not merely to entertain offers, but even to take the trouble to answer our letters.

However, we did find a landlord ultimately who was not unreasonable, and the house hunt ended in our fixing upon a villa. I pass over the point that my wife prevailed upon me to sign an agreement for its tenancy three months before we actually required it—just to secure it, as she said.

For the guidance of persons about to move, I would just hint that the tenant who has signed an agreement is not of such consequence in the eyes of landlords, agents, decorators, and the rest as the tenant who has not signed one.

It is the old story of the tailor paying most attention to the customer who does not pay his bill, and of treating disdainfully the man who gives cash without pressure.

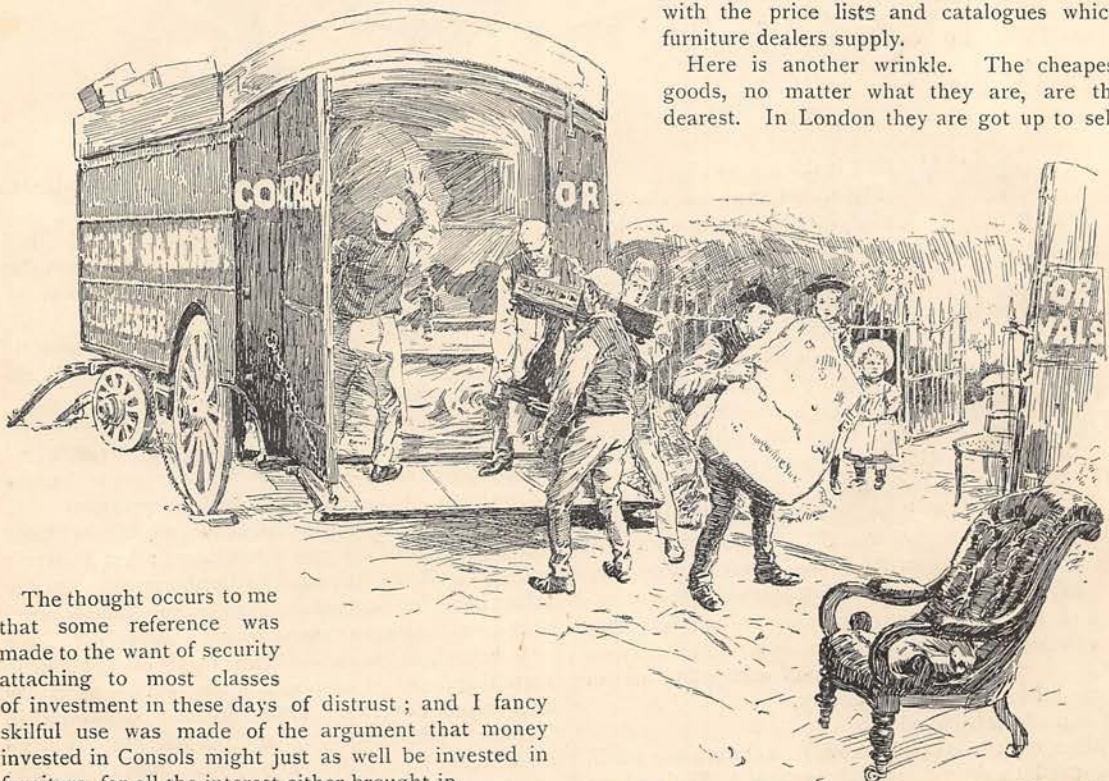
I soon realised that a larger house entailed not only larger rates, taxes, etc., and incidental expenses based upon the amount of the rent, but at the outset it meant more furniture. My wife broke it to me gently. I have a very faint idea of how and when a certain sum was mentioned as being well within our means to be spent in "new things."

joys and sorrows. I suppose by this time I had been infected with the moving fever to such a degree that I had reached the same stage as my wife in the insane desire to anticipate matters. I am not sure that I would not have bundled the outgoing tenants neck and crop into the gutter fully a couple of months before quarter day, to make room for me and mine, if the law had permitted such an outrage. But I had to content myself while "beating time" with the drawing up of an elaborate estimate of everything we should be likely to want in the new house.

May I commend this plan to persons about to marry, as well as to those about to move? Take a book, give a page to each room, write down the name of each article, and estimate the cost. Then total up the whole, and if the gross figure does not deter you at once from either marrying or moving, there is no hope for you; nothing can dissuade you from taking that fatal step.

Of course, you can paint your picture in bright but deceptive colours, and under-estimate the prices; but before you accept the total as correct, verify the items separately, as I did, by comparing the figures with the price lists and catalogues which furniture dealers supply.

Here is another wrinkle. The cheapest goods, no matter what they are, are the dearest. In London they are got up to sell.



The thought occurs to me that some reference was made to the want of security attaching to most classes of investment in these days of distrust; and I fancy skilful use was made of the argument that money invested in Consols might just as well be invested in furniture, for all the interest either brought in.

I will let you into a secret. I was wise enough to take my wife's estimate of the cost of the move, and then, quite privately, without her knowledge, to add half as much again to it, for I felt sure that the experiences of my early matrimonial days, when I first discovered that feminine finance is generally weak, would be repeated. I made sure that I had this sum to spare and then awaited events.

Don't conclude that I am blaming the partner of my

"WHEN A MAN SEES HIS HOUSE DISMANTLED" (p. 166).

If they were plain and inexpensive they would not be such a bad bargain, but they are frequently flashy and trashy imitations of a superior article. It is all show and no wear. As a dealer in the West-End told me—

"The only things one can afford to be careless about in London are textiles. Smoke and dirt will make

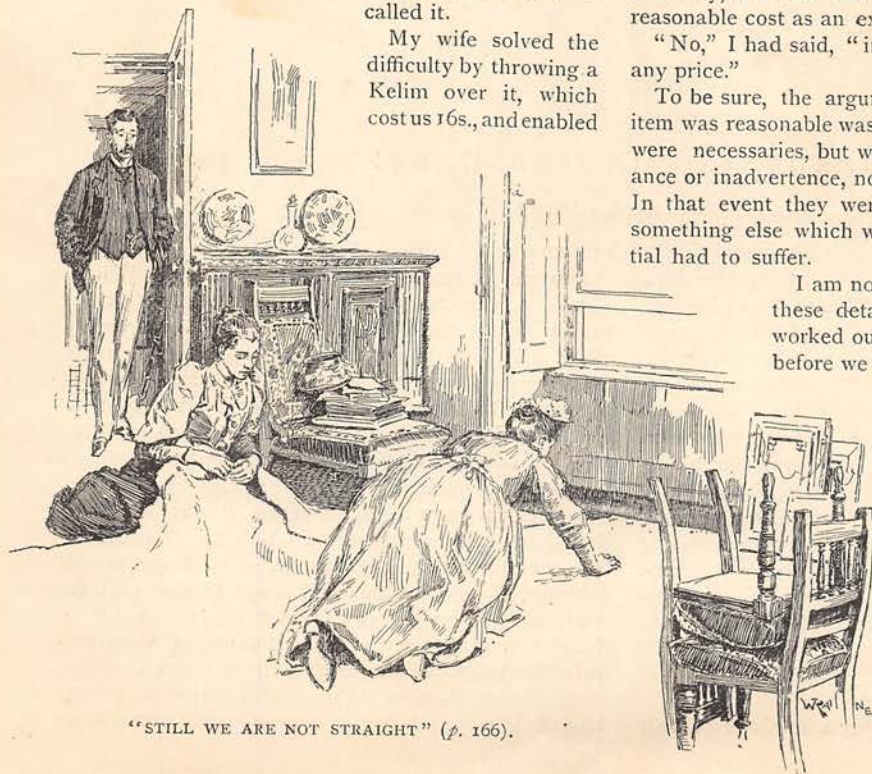
silk no better than jute, and it is often economy to buy the latter ; but tables and chairs, which are to last, ought to be good."

There was heart-burning, I am sure, when I compelled my wife to revise her prices by adding fifty per cent. She imagined that I wished to make the move impossible by putting the purchase of new furniture out of the question ; but the result was satisfactory in the end, for economies were effected, after long and earnest consultations as to the articles which might be struck off the list, or placed in reserve to be bought when a favourable opportunity in the dim and distant future should arise.

It was curious how the relative attractions of a coal scuttle and a new picture were pitted one against the other. The coal scuttle came out the winner in the competition. There was something of enjoyment, too, in the realisation that "Necessity is the mother of invention ;" for we hit upon a variety of ways of securing the desired effect at one half the cost, and it is a pleasure to recall the discoveries which were made in this direction by my helpmate.

I would instance one. We had a couch—a good, sound, substantial but Philistine article—a relic of the period when our forefathers had apparently lost all love of beauty of design but not their appreciation of solid wood and workmanship. The couch was too good to sell, in these days, but it would not harmonise with the style of furniture we had selected for our dining-room, which was to be rather Oriental. The problem was what was to be done with the couch, or sofa, as its first owners called it.

My wife solved the difficulty by throwing a Kelim over it, which cost us 16s., and enabled



"STILL WE ARE NOT STRAIGHT" (p. 166).



"MOST OF IT SEEMS OLD LUMBER" (p. 166).

us to strike out of our estimate the item "New couch, £7 10s."—net gain £6 14s.

I welcomed such expedients, for they were truly economical ; but I shut my ears to the suggestive hint—

"But it is so reasonable."

If the article in question duly appeared in our list at a lower price than that quoted to us, it was in my view decidedly not reasonable ; and if the article had been omitted from the list in the first instance as being a luxury, it would not do for my wife to plead its reasonable cost as an excuse for buying it.

"No," I had said, "if we don't want it, it is dear at any price."

To be sure, the argument that such and such an item was reasonable was often applied to articles which were necessities, but which had been, through ignorance or inadvertence, not been put down in the list. In that event they were bought in due course, but something else which was not so immediately essential had to suffer.

I am not anticipating by entering into these details, for all these points were worked out in theory and on paper long before we moved, and it was because I was so certain as to the correctness of our plans that I felt I could commiserate, in a patronising spirit, the man who had moved, or was in process of moving, at a time when I had personally had no experience of that ordeal.

It was only after the move I found that, even as regards estimated cost, quantities, etc., and indispensable furniture, the

original estimate, although it was a guiding star to us, had to be considerably revised and fully ten per cent. added to the total for unforeseen contingencies.

May I enumerate some of them? I pass over the helpless feeling which comes over one when a man sees his house dismantled by pantechnicon men. His household goods appear to be so awfully worn out that it is not surprising to him as he stands at his garden gate, watching the vans being filled, to receive offers from rag and bottle men to buy old lumber. Old lumber! Why, most of it seems old lumber, not worth the cost of removal.

By-and-by it is discovered that these furniture men have done their best to convert most of your property into old lumber. Why else did they blacken your mattresses with their boots? Why did they secretly hide all the keys of your clocks in places which up to this moment are undiscoverable? and why did they forget to remove a score or so of unconsidered trifles, which in themselves are small but in the aggregate require a nice little sum to replace?

I did not trust wholly to the removers. I prided myself on the care with which I went through the empty house to note that nothing of mine was left in it. But such is the difficulty in seeing familiar objects, that I confess I stared at the hat rail in the hall, the tools in the garden, the scraper, the letter-box, etc., etc., without realising that they required to be moved; and, as they were left behind, I have had to buy others since.

Then, carefully mapped out as our plans were in respect to the redecoration of the new house, the refurbishing of a portion of it, and other matters, I frankly avow that none of them went quite right, mainly

because, I suppose, we vainly imagined that all the world would busy itself to carry out our behests. Put not your trust in painters, neither in decorators, nor in house furnishers. They all want time. To give them time I kept my old house on for a fortnight, but a fortnight was not enough, and still we are not straight.

My wife has slaved as no member of the working classes will, to put things ship-shape. Order has been evolved out of chaos. I give her all credit. She must have lived on sandwiches and tea for a fortnight. I am afraid to say how many carpets she has laid, how much painting, staining, curtain-hanging, and even upholstering she has got through.

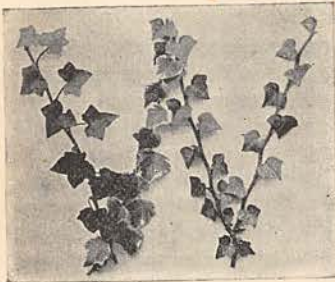
We are of that class who know that "If you want a thing done you must do it yourself," unless you have the money to pay for it. We might have employed a complete house furnisher, but where then would have been that terrible estimate, which up to the present has been our best friend—a species of brake upon the fast coach of extravagance.

Understand me, I do not say that when our labours shall have been completed that the result will not be worth the effort and expenditure, but this I will say, that moving is a frightful trial of one's temper, principle, and pocket. It is not to be lightly embarked upon. A man ought to sit down and count the cost in all respects; and then at the end of it all, you must expect to hear from your best friend the consoling remark—

"Halloa, old fellow, don't you think you have jumped from the frying-pan into the fire? I hear that your new neighbourhood is nothing but a fever trap!"

GARDENING IN FEBRUARY.

BY A PRACTICAL GARDENER.



garden. Everyone who has a garden of any pretensions wants a grass lawn for tennis, croquet, or to walk upon—a velvet-pile carpet of Nature's own handiwork.

The Making of a Tennis-Lawn.

This is the month to form either a tennis-court or an

ordinary grass lawn, and my remarks apply in both instances. A tennis-court must be of ample dimensions. A little cramped-up lawn, too small to wield a racket in—an apology for a "court"—is a very sorry affair. To play on it is uncomfortable, and the grass quickly wears away, through the feet constantly treading upon the same spot. A tennis-court should be about one hundred feet long and fifty wide: not less; and in its formation the work must not be scamped. Select a level position, and if the surface does not in any place vary more than six inches, it may be simply forked and raked over, drawing a tight line from corner to corner, to correct irregularities. A level spot is not, however, always at hand, and rough places must be made smooth for the game. First find the centre of the plot, and drive in a very stout stump of wood, the top of the peg to be on a level with the ground. Pegs must also be driven in at the corners of the lower end, with the top of each peg, of course, on the same level

INTER is slowly departing, the days are lengthening, and the sun sheds warmer beams on quickening vegetation. We seem to scent the flowers of spring and summer afar off, and make preparations to get them in our