HOUSEKEEPER'S WEEKLY

A JOURNAL OF HOME HELP AND INFORMATION AND ENTERTAINMENT

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When the forest's cooling shadows tempt to rest at sultry noon,
While the murmurs of the leaflets tempt to slumber with their tune;
When the clouds are fleecy whiteness, when the atmosphere is bland,
And the season spreads its gladness and its plenty o'er the land;
When the lakelet drinks the sunshine—while its mirrored gold is still—
And it waits to clasp the streamlets dancing gayly down the hill,
While God's beauties, like soft blessings permeate the earth and air,
And unspoken benedictions meet our vision everywhere,

Summer's come!

An Uncultivated Field.

BY MINERVA PARKER NICHOLS.

AS WEEDS grow in a rich field, plowed in deep brown furrows and left uncultivated, so our architecture, sown on the soil of rich natural products and national prosperity, has been left uncultivated so long that it has grown to weeds. And I appeal to you, my sister women, to at least clear out your own door-yards and attend to your own homes. It is a duty (not a pleasure) you owe yourselves and your families to rectify some of the evils which have crept into home-making.

I shall try to show you some of the weeds, that you may not cultivate them in your garden; show you some planted by the builders, and not a few by yourselves, and try to indicate something of the method by which the field may be redeemed and made productive.

The old proverb, "Fools build houses for wise men to live in," has long been the stock argument against all advice to build your own homes. It is a labor-saving argument for the man of the household, and a source of constant profit to the builder and speculator, who are both, like the clown, "willing to play the part of fool," if you are willing to pay them well for the trouble and loss of respect. And they have made steps up and steps down, for no earthly reason, unless it were to make stumbling-blocks and extra labor — put doors where you will never want them, and left them out where you would naturally think doors would be most needed; placed windows where they look out on the garden or the pig-sty, if there be one, and erected solid walls on southern exposures. They make bath-rooms in which you can have no heat, the place of all others where you most require it. If there is a pantry, it is in some dark corner where you are in danger of putting the flat-irons in the best china.

This proverb really meant, "Fools build houses, and it *takes* wise men to live in them" and be comfortable, and escape bodily harm from the numerous pitfalls.

The chief charm of any house is its individuality. There are many things which houses or people possess in common; but the thing which charms us is the thing peculiar to a certain house or a certain person.

Women often seem so helpless when they come to design their own houses that the mere thought of a specification to be read or an inspection of the plans, is enough to deprive the poor architect of their society for days. I assure you, French novels will seem dull compared with the delight of threading your way through the translation of plans, when you have once mastered the mechanical part of the drawing.

Architectural clients are of many kinds. There is the entirely satisfactory client, who knows what she wants, and knows when she has it; who knows just the style in which she wishes her house to be built, and of what material. She has taken into account that a house of wood is all right in the country, and is absurd in the city; that a dressed stone house in the country looks like a milkmaid in a ball dress. And there is the other client, who gives general directions, and allows the architect to develop the plan. These two sit high in the favor of the architect.

But there is the woman who wants a large house, and wants it to be a very cheap house, finished with all the late improvements; and if in an unguarded moment you draw the house which she desires, she becomes more and more delighted with her plan as it grows. Then comes a week of anxiety while waiting for the bids. At last they arrive, and are about one-half more than the client can or will pay. The architect and builder come in for much blame; and you begin the operation of cutting down.

No patient ever flinched under the surgeon's knife as a client flinches under the amputation of cherished anticipations. She feels robbed. You suggest pine in place of the hardwood finish. She submits graciously. Cheaper hardware is added. The floors are changed from oak to pine. You speak of the open fire-places, with tiles and mantels, but she tells you that she had forgotten that she must have an *extra* one! The reduction in the floor and hardware are absorbed in adding it. You are not getting on very well in the reduction, but cannot protest here, for fire-places are poor places in which to insert the knife of economy. (There was a time not long ago when the splendid old fire-places were walled up, as if they were the very doors by which evil spirits entered, who so vexed our ancestors in the days of witchcraft.)

We suggest the plumbing, but the client will not listen to that. We mention the fact that the house is large. *Large!* We are assured that it will require skill to pack the family in the house as it now is; and the furniture, which is large (I have noticed that people who have limited space always buy large furniture), must be sacrificed to allow them to get in at all. I think of the ornamental gable, only to find that it can not be spared.

But my client thinks of the kitchen; one window less will do. And the house might be two feet narrower, and need not have a cellar, but be built on piers, for all the world like the frost-bitten storks one sees on screens.

The cellar, once entered, seems a happy field for operations. The circulation is low at that point, and the nerves are not active; so the cement floor is dispensed with, sacrificed on the altar of a bay or stained-glass window.

May we not hope, as a better understanding grows up between architect and client, that we will both come back to the simple dignity of our Colonial ancestors, borrowing their honest construction and beauty of design, then adding all the modern improvements in the way of lighting, heating and plumbing?

Then a word for the builder—for whom I have a profound respect, provided he does not try to be both architect and builder—a position which is not to the advantage of the house owner. You might as well expect a school boy to chastise himself when he plays truant, as to expect most builders to correct their own mistakes.

Don't try to get more house for the same amount of money than any one else ever did; for the builder must either make you a present of his labor, or deceive you in the value and quality of the work and material. Really good results only come from mutual respect on the part of both owner and builder. You should secure a contractor in whom you have confidence, and then trust to his experience as far as matters of construction go, but keep full possession of the original design, which is your

field of action. Do not allow him to deviate from that plan, unless by your suggestion. With the best intentions, builders often suggest change, simply because they have always done a certain thing, and do not look with favor on a new arrangement.

The money spent in securing the architect's services as superintendent is not ill-spent; but should you prefer to undertake the task yourself, be sure that you are as well posted as you would think it necessary to be in undertaking to be your own surgeon, lawyer, or optician. There are some rare souls who can do these things without previous knowledge; but I would warn you not to be too positive in your directions, nor to insist on their literal fulfilment. You would be surprised often to see the result if the builder followed your instructions, literally. I cannot but respect the self-control of builders in receiving such instructions without the slightest suggestion to the amateur of their utter absurdity. If he tells you it cannot be done, you think him blunt; if he is politic, he does as he thinks best, and you are none the wiser; if he is dishonest, he detects your experience and plays upon it. If you had explained *what* you wanted, and not the *way* you wanted it executed, he would probably have served you better.

And there are the clients who want a bay like Mrs. A's, a porch like Mrs. B's, a roof like Mrs. C's, inside finish like Mrs. E's, the stairs like some old photograph, and a doorway like the one found in some old print. By this time the fiend of the departed "crazy patchwork" has arrived to vex the architect, who tries in vain to harmonize these varied features in one design.

And there is the client who patiently spends days selecting carpets and wall paper, but cannot be induced to examine plans or read specifications; and the client who makes her own sketch,—often a good one, for which the architect gives her well-merited credit. Alas! she is so delighted with her labor that she assumes all the credit and glory of the building when finished, and will assure you that "the house was designed by herself—in fact, she was her own architect." She reluctantly admits that they did employ an architect, but you are given to understand that it was a useless precaution on her part; in fact, the architect was secured to take the blame if there was a failure—to do the mechanical work, and save the client the trouble of dealing with workmen.

As there are all kinds of clients, so there are all kinds of houses. They have seemed to me like people—the houses that are all front and show—like shallow and superficial people; the selfish houses, with cramped front doors; the secretive houses, with small, ill-lighted windows; the giddy houses, with much flimsy ornament and many colors; the plain houses, like Quaker women in their quiet garb; the dignified houses, like well-rounded characters; the dainty house, like our society women; the jolly houses; the sad, dissipated, and extravagant—all have their counterparts in the human families who occupy them.

And the house that is very proper in front will grow uninteresting on the sides, with a small frame rear building, having a flat tin roof and short chimney. They remind me, not of people, but of the days when I was the mother of a large family of paper dolls. Standing in front, surveying them as they were propped up with invisible blocks of wood, I was delighted; moving to the side, I felt some disappointment. The glimmer of the front, combined with the scant apparel of the rear, was not gratifying to my maternal pride. When seen from the rear the entire sham was revealed, the straps on the shoulders alone suggesting the glory of the front. Now on the houses you see the cornice carried around the front and sides and neatly tucked around the shoulders of the rear, for all the world like the paper doll dresses! If our houses are to be so unsightly from the rear we must erect neat little signs, like the motto, "Keep off the grass," saying, "This house to be inspected from this point only. Any person found looking at it from the rear will be liable to the law." Or, far better, we might give up this senseless practice. Rich people, who need practice no economy, make the front of their house of cut stone and the rear of plain brick, simply because it has been a long standing practice,—a kind of shallow deceit which deceives no one.

This is the field which I would open to you, and you will be surprised at the new world it leads to. You will take a new interest in all the details, before unseen. The styles of architecture being to arrange themselves in groups, as do favorite authors or artists. It is a new and interesting book, that can be read every time you go on the street. Every country road has chapters of the tale. Traveling takes on a new charm; and you come to know and understand the people by the houses in which they live.

And a word in closing for those of my sisters who think of architecture as a profession. Like the new land in the far West, there are many claims not taken. It requires courage, some capital, much labor in traveling, as the road is long, and a real love talent for the work. These, with a thorough training in some recognized school of architecture, are both your tools and capital. With this equipment you need fear no competition or jealousy, for the love of art and justice is so strong in the members of the architectural profession that you have but to prove ability to be admitted as a worthy member.

NOT SENSITIVE.—A young clergyman once preached a strong temperance sermon. When he had finished, a deacon said to him: "I am afraid you have made a mistake. Mr. Jones, who pays the highest pew rent, is a distiller; he will be angry." The minister said: "Oh, I am sorry; I will go and explain it to Mr. Jones, and remove any unfavorable impression, and tell him that I did not mean him." Accordingly, he waited upon Mr. Jones, who, in addition to the profession of distilling, also carried on a good many other branches of trade and a good many amusements, and was not distinguished above other men as an ascetic. The pastor expressed his regret to Mr. Jones for anything in the sermon which hurt his feelings. He was somewhat relieved when, with a jovial air, Mr. Jones said: "Oh, bless you, don't mind that at all. It must be a mighty poor sermon that don't hit me somewhere."

Girls of To-day.

BY CHARLOTTE PERKINS STETSON.

GIRLS of to-day, give ear!
Never since time began
Has come to the race of man
A year, a day, an hour
So full of promise and power
As the time that now is here.

Here at the gates of gold
You stand in the pride of youth,
Strong in courage and truth;
Stirred by a force kept back
Through centuries long and black,
Armed with a power three-fold.

Charlotte Perkins Stetson.

THE profile of Mrs. Stetson reminds one strongly of George Eliot; it is probably due entirely to the chin, which is unusually long, for man or woman,—but certainly the likeness is there. What does it portend?

Born in 1860, she is still a young woman, but has already passed through some of the deepest and most developing experiences of life, wifehood and motherhood.

Working for the education of her only child, a daughter, Mrs. Stetson has had also the care of an invalid mother, and has not until lately had the time to give to writing, which her remarkable talent would indicate to be her *metier*.

She is one of the women who are brave enough to speak out their inmost sentiments even to unsympathetic audiences; one of those whom the world is apt to call "cranks;" yet, after all, cranks are often those whose views are simply ahead of the times, and therefore misunderstood and maligned.

Since 1888 Mrs. Stetson has lived in California, and it is of some experiences peculiar to that region that she writes, in most charming and amusing vein, for the next issue of the HOUSEKEEPER'S WEEKLY.

As a writer for magazines, in the past few years, she has already made her mark, and to see an article with her signature is to know that you have before you something bright, thoughtful, and always very readable. Her poems, too, are of a high order of merit, and are deservedly popular.

As a cook and sempstress she especially prides herself upon her accomplishments, and through taking boarders she is enabled to so far provide for her daughter and herself as to leave her pen and voice free to express sentiments too radical to find a market.

Since the date of her first appearance as a public speaker in 1890, before the Nationalist Club in Pasadena, California, she has spoken more than one hundred times upon this and kindred themes, advocating "Nationalist" methods. Her chief interest is the study of our present social conditions, and the search for practical and if possible immediate methods of improvement.

But one must meet Mrs. Stetson face to face, or at least through the medium of correspondence, to appreciate the originality and peculiar individuality of one whose likeness to George Eliot and Savonarola can hardly be without meaning.

TEACHER—"Name some of the most important things existing to-day that were unknown a hundred years ago." Tommy—"You and me."