

and a wash in the waiting-room helped to complete a somewhat hasty morning toilet. Out in the road the maze of traffic seemed bewildering, but the right "bus" was soon hailed; once on that I felt secure, and gave myself up to half-an-hour's enjoyment of a busy London scene. Who has not felt the fascination that this thronging city holds? A fascination that is particularly attractive to country birds.

The sun was breaking through the grey gloom of the morning fog, glinting on the harness of the horses, reflecting itself in the shining windows of the shops which were undergoing their process of "dressing." Costers were bringing along their carts of produce fresh from the markets, and street stalls were being set out. In Piccadilly it was brighter still; hansoms going briskly by, few carriages as yet, but several riders on their way to the Park, everywhere a bustle of life—the West-End type of life. Involuntarily Frederick Locker's lines came into my mind:—

"Piccadilly! Shops, palaces, bustle and breeze,

The whirring of wheels and the murmur of trees;

By day and by night, whether noisy or still,

Whatever my mood is, I love Piccadilly!"

The neighbourhood of Sloane Square was the direction I sought, a neighbourhood whose quaint landmarks are rapidly being improved away by the modern builder. Here old Chelsea ends; if we want to find Carlyle's Chelsea we must follow the King's Road and work our way towards the Embankment through one of the old-fashioned streets which the sage must often have trod. Even now, in spite of the modern builder, Chelsea appeals to one's sense of the picturesque, and seems to link one with past generations as no other district of London does; the scarlet-coated pensioners belonging to the Royal Hospital meet one at every turn, and the bugle calls from the Military School close by keep the hours of the day as punctually as the chimes of the Greenwich clock. I am happy to think that the "desirable residence" I have come to visit is strictly within this parish, still happier to find that it overlooks the broad court that stretches to either side of the avenue leading to the main gateway of the Pensioner's Hospital.

My "Bachelor Girl" greeted me with surprise; this was a more rapid move than she had quite calculated upon, but I did not think it any the less necessary when I noted the effect that bachelor living was making upon her health. It was plain that another three years of Bohemian life would effectually banish all remnants of youth.

It was close upon the luncheon hour when she was able to set out with me to inspect the house we sought; we were both in a frame of mind that we meant to be critical, anxious not to be "taken-in," and not to let pass any details that might be important afterwards; but as it was our first experience of the kind we very likely looked as nervous as we felt. Looking back after a three years' trial of London life, I think it was a special Providence that gave us an honest man and a kindly one to deal with.

This man—the then tenant—opened the door to us himself, and we briefly explained our errand. We learned that there were others in the field before us, although there was still a possibility of our securing the lease if we could decide quickly. Then we made a free inspection of the premises, the fixtures, etc., and, as far as we were able, of the drainage. Everything seemed satisfactory, and the price of the fixtures, which comprised spring blinds and cords to every window all nearly new, gas brackets, curtain poles and rings, a splendid linen cupboard, and several other things, was a very moderate one. What pleased us even more than all was to find the wall-papers in every room clean and fresh and in excellent taste, the paint too only needed to be washed to come up like new. Some of the ceilings would need to be whitewashed, and the kitchen walls would need fresh distemper, but this was not a great outlay.

The house was a comparatively modern one, that is it belonged to a time when houses were well and solidly, if somewhat plainly built. The doors were thick and fitted easily, heavy window-frames and deep-skirting boards, good pantries and cellarage, and marble mantelpieces in every room, showed sound workmanship. But the charm was its outlook, and with every floor it grew better.

The grey-roofed buildings that reminded one strongly of Hampton Court Palace faced us, the fine trees surrounding them, and the stretch of green grass adding to their quaintness. From the upper windows one saw the columns of the beautiful suspension bridge over the Thames, beyond that the trees of Battersea Park, and a faint outline of Surrey hills. It was a lovely view indeed. At the back too we were open, having a long line of back gardens, with here and there a fine tree growing, and a glimpse of the lime trees of the royal avenue.

"It's worth an effort to secure a house like this," I whispered to my companion, and she assented, as anxious as I was to clinch the bargain.

The lease, we ascertained, had still eighteen years to run; a decided advantage in a neighbourhood of rapidly-increasing rents; it could be taken on transfer and there was no premium to pay.

We explained that in the event of our taking over the lease it would be with the object of sub-letting a part of the house, as we could not afford to occupy the whole of it.

"That is precisely what I do myself," said our cicerone, and gave us substantial evidence as to what his own success had been with such attempts; they amounted to the fact that applications had always been more numerous than he had accommodation for. A rapid calculation showed that it was possible, granting that all circumstances were favourable, to make the house pay well.

"We must think it well over," we said at last, having completed the tour of inspection, and we left, promising to send in our final decision by the end of the week.

Together, in the bachelor's bed-sitting-room, we went over every detail afresh, planning, calculating, weighing the pros and cons of our project.

The little furniture that we could count upon was far from sufficient, although it included such essential things as a fair supply

of house and table linen, plate and cutlery, with some china, still it was a hopeful beginning. Even counting that we let some rooms unfurnished, we must still lay out some twenty or thirty pounds in the purchase of carpets, mats, curtains, beds and tables, to say nothing of stair-rod and other minor items. Besides this we must pay for the fixtures, any law expenses over the transfer of the lease, and we ought to have a quarter's rent ready.

"And we have absolutely no capital!" we groaned. We thought of the alluring advertisements put out by the loan offices, and decided that a loan of fifty pounds, repayable by monthly instalments, was not an impossible thing in view of the success we were going to ensure.

"I think I must first tell Uncle B. about all this," I said. And this was agreed. Uncle B. was a good friend and kind to us girls.

My train left St. Pancras at midnight, so at eleven o'clock I bid good-bye to my bachelor girl.

"I don't half like turning you out of doors at such an hour," she said regretfully.

It did seem eerie truly, but ten times more so to be set down at the lonely country station at 3 A.M., where all was dark, no moon, no lamps, only a few pale stars lighting faintly the black sky. However, I shook myself together and set out as boldly as I could; there was one cloud in the sky that caught a red glow from somewhere, it outlined the tops of the trees, and I thought of the pillar of cloud and fire which guided the Israelites of olden times.

The wind whistled and rustled the branches of the trees and hedges, bringing down showers of dead leaves, and startled rabbits shot across my path, making me give a frightened jump—they seemed uncannily big in the dark. But the longest journey comes to an end at last, and, as the last wicket gate closed behind me I heaved a deep sigh of relief; a few moments more and I was inside our own garden and a lamp shone through the window.

A lamp's light, a cosy bit of fire, a singing kettle and a supper (or breakfast) tray soon banished the last trace of nervousness, and I barred the door and went to bed glad and grateful, only pausing to whisper as I passed one door:

"All right, mother, safe and sound," and to hear her answer, "Thank God, dearie."

About one o'clock I awoke to find the sun flooding my room, and someone saying, "Are you ever going to get up to-day?" then remembered the duties that lay before me.

The first thing to be done was clearly to consult Uncle B.; he might think I had been on a fool's errand and my project a wild one; men—especially business men—have but a low opinion of women's capabilities.

But when instead of ousting my scheme and putting it to ridicule, Uncle B. said, "Well done, lassie, I'll stand by you!" I was too glad almost to properly express my gratitude; and especially when he offered to be surety instead of allowing us to have recourse to any loan office whatsoever.

And that very day a telegram went up to London with the fateful words, "Secure house at once without delay," and then, for good or ill, the die was cast.

(To be continued.)

