



A Farm on a Berkshire Hill-top

he and his wife go on the approach of cold weather and return in the spring. When they vacate the one place or the other, they find some one who is willing to look after it in consideration of a free rental.

Most people prepare for winter by banking up the house with leaves or cornstalks, held in place by boards staked against them. Others use sods. On the most exposed sides of the house double windows are fastened, and some put on storm-doors at the main entrances.

As far as the cold is concerned, winter is most disturbing in the shiver awakened by its approach. Mentally and constitutionally one soon gets adjusted to it, and finds the winter occupations, the crisp air, and the brilliant sunshine or the white whirl of the storms in many ways enjoyable. And it no sooner settles down to really cold weather than we begin to look forward to spring. That gives a warmth which nothing else can.

A New Englander who has attained distinction in his particular calling has sometimes told me that when he and his brothers were little fellows, and slept in the room under the roof in the L, the snows would sift in at the cracks during the winter storms, and when they ran down stairs in the morning they left behind them the tracks of their bare feet in the little drifts. Such stories seem by rights to belong to the days of the first settlers; but when you drive along the crooked New England roadways next summer, notice the houses. There are some, yes, a good many, which seem not to have been shingled for "an age." The shingles curl up with brittle decay, and in places have dropped away altogether. Such a roof every storm must penetrate. Notice the windows of the more shabby houses. You can count many broken panes. Some are stuffed out with rags or an old hat. Some have been stopped with shingles or boards nailed on. Some are not stopped at all. In the heavier rains there are probably pots and pans set about under the leaks. In winter there is a cleaning up after each snow-storm.

Perhaps the hardest thing the inhabitants have to do in a New England winter is to get up in the morning. The air of the sleeping-rooms is almost as keen as that of outdoors. The window-panes are blurred with frost. Every breath of the sleepers makes a visible cloud of vapor. The bed is comfortable enough. The feather bed, beneath, half envelops one, and above are blanket after blanket and quilt upon quilt. Jack Frost would have to be a much sharper fellow than he is to penetrate that mass. But to make up one's mind to step out from that warm nest is a serious matter. The older members of the family get up from a sense of responsibility and the force of habit. The younger members get up when they have to.

Mr. Farmer, when he arises, finds the whole house full of cold, unless he has a big sitting-room stove where a few coals linger from the big "chunks" he put in last night, or unless, as is often the case in the villages, he has a coal stove there. In the majority of farm-houses every fire is out, and we can imagine Mr. Farmer moving shiveringly about until he has one started. It may be it is Mrs. Farmer who has to shiver in the cold kitchen while she is kindling the fire; but we will give Mr. Farmer the credit for being more gallant than to allow that, usually.

During the coldest weather it is no easy matter to keep the house warm, even in the daytime. The wind and the frost come in at every crack, and some of the houses are so decrepit with age, or lack of care, that it would be no wonder if at times the inmates actually suffered. But by keeping the stove crammed with wood, the living-rooms are usually comfortable, though even then there will be a chilliness apparent in the corners and along the walls.

The most distressing cases are those where the stock of sawed wood is allowed to run low, and the "women folks" are obliged to resort to constant appeal to the men to get enough to keep the fires going, or are compelled to saw it themselves. This state of affairs is called by

The Home of Comfort, but not of Luxury
the New Englanders shiftlessness.

(Concluded next issue.)

