

## A House for the Holidays.

By R. E. VERNEDE.

"**T**HINKING of renting a house in the country for the holidays, are you?" said the Man Opposite. "Take my advice and go down and see it first."

"Do you think it a necessity?" I inquired.

"Absolute."

"Because I've just heard of one that sounds delightful," I continued. "The only drawback is that it's eight hours' off by the train. I simply haven't got time to go and look over it. Trenton's the nearest town."

The Man Opposite looked up.

"What is the house called?"

"Providence Grange," I said in all innocence.

He went into a sudden roar of laughter. "O, Lord!" he said, wiping his eyes when he had finished. "I thought I'd stopped that man. Henry Gomple, Esq? Yes, that's the rogue. Got his advertisement with you? Read it out. I'd like to hear it again before I translate it to you."

He had another attack of laughter, while I read aloud the description of Providence Grange, which had taken my fancy.

"This lovely old country house, standing in its own grounds, amid moor and forest, contains three reception and seven bed and dressing rooms, besides hall and usual offices. Two miles from station, seven minutes' from the sea. Stabling for four horses. Excellent trout fishing in the neighborhood. Close to golf-links church and post office. Tenants entitled to the use of fruit and vegetable gardens. N. B.—Providence Grange, besides containing every modern attraction, is not without its historic associations. It was captured by

the Roundheads in the Civil War, and the Protector himself, passed a night under its roof. Rent, five guineas a week."

"That's it," said the Man Opposite. "And a bad night Oliver must have passed. How do I know? I passed a night there myself—five years ago. I was a fool like you; and I liked that advertisement too. Or, rather, my wife did. Not having a friend to warn us, we took it for a month without troubling to go and see it. I was rather doubtful to begin with, but Gomple sent us a photograph of the house taken from the south lawn, and that settled me."

"He sent me one taken from the west border," I put in.

"He would. Blurred, isn't it? The one he sent to us was. Couldn't see anything, in fact. But we argued that if he was willing to submit a photograph, there could scarcely be much wrong with it. That's Gomple's cunning. Well, we started off one fine day in July—servants, luggage, family, family's dolls, canary, cat, guinea pig—by the only train in the Jay, and we got to Trenton at dusk. Trenton's a poky little village on one of the branch lines that are all branch and no line. I think we arrived an hour late. I'd written to a job-master to have a wagonette to meet us, and we found a farm cart only. "What's the meaning of this?" I said to the fellow in charge. "Mawster said as 'e weren't going to send nothen finer'n this—not to take folks along that ther ditch," said the man sulkily. There was nothing to be done except to use it. We put the most necessary things and the children in and the rest of us walked. The man was quite right in calling the road a ditch. At