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THE PHYSIOGNOMY OF HOUSES.

To a lively imagination every object of inanimate nature in turn may seem endowed with life. It is the source of much poetical figure, as in the child who sees the stars winking at him, and the child-like Homer who makes the trickling cliff weep from under its shaggy brow. In passing down the Potomac a gay friend exclaimed, "See how that house *squints* at us!" It was the very word; the resemblance was perfect. The doors and windows of the gable simulated a human countenance, and an obliquity in the upper row produced the very effect described. Every reader of Dickens must have observed the frequency with which he personifies streets, houses, trees, and even furniture; thus aiding his general description in a high degree.

But there is an expression much more significant, than the elementary one which has just been noted. To a certain extent this is caught even by casual observers; but we desire to develop the idea more fully by means of several instances, which may be multiplied at pleasure by any reader.

What figure is more natural than to say of a castle on the Rhine, that it frowns? The dark walls of a fortress are made to scowl. A row of cottages on a sunny hill-side smile on us. In the course of a journey on horseback in one of

the Southern States, I came to the foot of a mountain, at a point where a foaming stream poured itself over some limestone rocks. Among the baldest crags on the flank of the eminence stood an old stone house. Its walls were thick and tall and pierced with a very few narrow windows, and there was that uncomfortable appearance about the uncorniced roof which reminds one of a hat without a brim. Though weary, neither I nor my companion thought of alighting. The air of the structure was forbidding and inhospitable. There was no twinkle from the windows, no smile played about the door, and no waving locks of foliage clustered around the brow of stone; all was wrinkled, uncompromising and saturnine. We needed not to ask who dwelt in the pile; all its story was told by the expression of its countenance.

I have in my eye the habitation of a retired scholar, not many miles from our village. There is nothing costly or recondite in the architecture, but every traveller who gains his first glimpse of it, with the blue hills for a back-ground, feels refreshed by its hilarity and snugness. The piercings of the wall are symmetrical, like the features of an exquisite face. The graceful overhanging of the eaves, along which flowering vines are trained, produces the effect of brow and ringlets above a beautiful face. The colours, the decorations, the shrubbery, the enclosure, the walks and parterres, all form an ensemble which is *riant* and captivating. Neatness, comfort and consistency, fill the beholder with a satisfaction typical of that which he will enjoy within. On departing, he turns to take a look at the cottage, and remembers it as a charming countenance. How different is the farm-house, not a mile on the road! Red-brick, square, solid, angular, naked, with great chimneys, broad doors, and stout hedge; the barn and stables large and well-appointed, but obtrusive and untasteful. Here is wealth but no beauty. It is a sturdy, self-complacent, obstinate looking house; resembling the farmer's ox, who stands by the rack, or the farmer him-

self, broad, hale, muscular, satisfied, and repulsive, who places his arms akimbo and looks at you, as you pass, with the air of a baron.

There is still another aspect of house physiognomy which will recur to every mind on the first lines of description, as too marked to escape the most inobservant. The fence is down, and geese are waddling in the yard. Through the unhinged door you look clear through the passage, empty of all but a brace of gaunt hounds at an earthen trencher. The axe and beetle lie by a pile of incorrigible oak roots. The bee-hives are overturned and the bench is black with the weather. Looking more nearly, you perceive that one window is boarded up, as it were an eye out; others are stuffed with old hats, bed-quilts and remnants of carpet; sickly bandages. The walls are gaping and the timbers decayed. In such appearances you read of unthrift, straits, and perhaps dishonesty, as much as in the sallow visage, tangled iron-grey locks, contracted brow, sinister glance, battered hat, and ragged vesture of the sauntering tenant, who shivers at the door.

Did you ever take note of the sad funereal look of a deserted house? Half a mile off, you say to yourself—you scarcely know why—"No one dwells beneath that roof." Its face is wan and deeply melancholic. It is breathless; no curl of smoke floats above the dilapidated chimney. A hollow blackness reigns where the lights should be: "there is no speculation in those eyes" The door yawns as if to reveal a cavern within. No jocund play of children salutes eye or ear. The very domestic fowls have deserted the unfruitful haunts; and the cat that glares upon you, and flies, has the aspect of an untamed panther. Where flowers may once have been, the mullein, stramonium and pokeberry rear their unsightly heads. The curb of an old well is crumbling away, and from the kitchen-wall the protuberance of a former oven is broken into uncouth ruin. If you enter, you are alarmed at the echo of your own footsteps, and the rumble

of swallows in the chimney, and are glad to get away. You think of death and desolation. Upon a furtive glance, as you leave it, the grim ghastly front is not unlike a grinning skull. It is a lesson in architectural physiognomy, which every one has taken, but which no one willingly repeats.

Happily it is not customary in America, as in some parts of Europe, to variegate the fronts of houses with several colours, in stripes, vines [and the like. I have known only two houses thus adorned. But what we lack in polychromatics, we make up in oddities of form, or what Sir Walter Scott calls "curly-wurlies." Let a man, or a woman, be smitten with an imperfect inkling of Elizabethan projections, and the whole house forthwith breaks out into gables; all the real and mock chimneys are clustered and crested; every available nook and corner has its carved beams, peaks and corbels. To my poor eye these look like so many elf-locks-or bald spots on the cranium of the edifice; so many carbuncles on its nose, wens and warts on its face, and tusks in its mouth.

A house may be as impertinent as a man. It may cock its nose at us, or make faces, or smile or grin. We naturally say of certain façades, that they are affected; or they are would-if-I-could-ish. Others have the great advantage of modesty. Where houses are planned by their owners, the master's character is apt to be reflected in the pile. Before contracting, gentlemen-builders ought to pore well over the elevation, with the question (not merely) What will it cost? but What will it express? No man is called upon to gibbet himself to every passer-by on the highway, by a huge misshapen Gothic portico, any more than to offend by a tubercular proboscis or black eye. Some rows of suburban cottages provoke to laughter as really as gutta-percha dolls, but are less alterable. In regard to houses, the maxim must be reversed, *FRONTI NULLA FIDES*. Tell me where you live, and I will tell you who you are. Dwellers grow like their houses; and just as truly houses grow like their dwellers. This

action and reaction is such a serious thing, that I advise every man on reading of these presents, to go forth and make serious inspection of the house he lives in.

C. Q.

SONG.

Why tell the heart that Hope's a dream,
While summer skies are bright,
And youth is sporting in the beam
Of beauty, love and light ?
Alas ! the truth is feeble here,
You whisper in a dreamer's ear.

Why tell the heart that Hope's a dream,
When shadows round it fall.
And light and love and beauty seem
Vain and illusive all ?
Enough—the sting's already there ;
Why needlessly intrude on care ?

Why tell the heart that Hope's a dream
When wintry days are o'er,
And life is laughing in the beam
Of pleasure as before ?
To feel the truth brings only pain ;
Then do not whisper it again.

Ah no ! the heart is ever such—
Still reckless in its mirth,
And flattering Hope its only touch
Of Heaven upon earth.
Away ! nor mar the busy scheme
Of rosy Hope's eternal dream.