

THINGS that MAKE a HOME



TO-MORROW, as it happens, is the tenth anniversary of my wedding.

For days, my wife and I have been considering how we should celebrate the auspicious occasion. Dine out, perhaps, and then a theatre or a cinema? We might even dance somewhere, and watch our fellow-citizens enjoying themselves to the peculiar rhythm of American music.

That's what we think just now, but, when it comes to the point, I know very well what we shall do. We shall settle down quietly by the fire and talk over old times and savour the fact that no cinema or theatre or dance club has as much happiness to offer us as our own home.

Dull, do you think? But then we are old-fashioned people, so our friends hint, simply because we like to make our home the true centre of our lives.

I am afraid those same friends do not think very much of the room where we shall spend our anniversary evening, where, indeed, we spend most evenings of the year.

It used to be the kitchen of an old farmhouse. It has no gadgets of any kind, except electric light, which we make ourselves. The floor, with a rug or two upon it, is stone-flagged. The fireplace, where we burn logs, is open.

IT ISN'T A SHOW ROOM

There is hardly any furniture—an old sea-chest, which bears my somewhat battered hats and the dog's lead and a bowl of flowers and letters for the post; a little round table made by the local carpenter; a couple of armchairs with rather dicky springs; open bookshelves of plain wood with dozens of books stacked untidily upon them; a couple of pewter beer mugs; a miscellaneous collection of pipes, fishing rods, tobacco jars, reels of cotton, balls of cord, and feminine oddments.

Not a show room by any manner of means, but a room that is very obviously lived in, a room that means home to me. I feel the same sort of affection for it that I feel for an old coat or an old pipe—or even an old friend.

HOWARD MARSHALL this week comes to you as the family man. He loves his home and all it stands for. His finest thoughts are sent to you in this article. Above you see Mr Marshall in his home, with his wife and son.

There we come to it—a home should be friendly above all things, and if you find friendliness in the austerity of modern chromium-plated furniture or the mock dignity of imitation antiques, that is your affair—not mine. Tastes differ, as one of my friends has recently discovered.

He used to live, this friend, in a home very nearly as untidy as ours. It was a bit shabby, perhaps, but very comfortable—a little careless looking, with books lying about and a couple of dogs on the hearth, old leather chairs, and pipes on the mantelpiece. Then my friend married and took his wife to this house of his.

She had one look at it—and set to work. She spring-cleaned it, tidied it, and spruced it up, put fresh covers on the chairs, and generally licked it into shape.

That home is quite dead now. All the friendliness has been stamped out of it. I hardly dare smoke even a cigarette there, let alone a pipe. The books are shut away behind glass doors. The dogs are banished to the garden.

A lifeless, smug, thoroughly unhappy house, and my poor friend wanders through it like a stranger. A house, like thousands of others, without character or individuality.

If a house is to become a home, it must reflect the individual taste of its occupier. Perhaps you have read a book called "Babbit," by Sinclair Lewis, the American novelist?

Sinclair Lewis—Red Lewis, he is called—is an amazing fellow. I have sat in a room with him for hours while he has paced up and down in his shirt sleeves, prophesying the doom of European civilisation, a favourite theme of his.

HOUSES—AND HOMES

Anyway, Red Lewis knows something about a home, and in "Babbit" he describes one of those homes we so often see advertised as having every modern convenience.

Beautifully decorated and fitted and furnished—the plumbing perfect—"And the bedroom," says Lewis, "came right out of Cheerful Modern Houses for Medium (Please turn to page 11.)"

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Incomes. If people had ever lived and loved there, read thrillers at midnight, and lain in beautiful indolence on a Sunday morning, there were no signs of it. It had the air of being a very good room in a very good hotel. The whole house was as competent and glossy as this bedroom. In fact, there was but one thing wrong with the house—it was not a home."

Please do not jump down my throat for suggesting that untidiness is one of the essentials of a happy home. I suggest nothing of the sort. The housewife, after all, has her pride.

I do submit, though, that if we thought less of conventional appearance and more of practical comfort, our houses might become more human, more tempting of an evening. And for this happy compromise there will have to be toleration as well as affection between husband and wife.

I sometimes think that the home is fighting a losing battle to-day. There are so many counter-attractions—such entertainments as dirt-track racing, the dogs, &c., hockey, boxing, all-in wrestling, dancing, cinemas, theatres—allurements which make the fireside seem merely a place for those who have nothing better to do or no money to spend on amusement.

Please do not mistake me or think me a kill-joy. I have no quarrel with most of these entertainments. It is good that we should be able to relax now and again. I only

submit that they should not cause us to forget the far more lasting joys of home.

I do quarrel most bitterly, it is true, with the fact that so many of my fellow-countrymen are forced to live in conditions which make happiness in the house virtually impossible.

I look forward to the day when every family in Britain shall have at least the opportunity to be happy.

I say "opportunity," for whether we attain happiness or not depends ultimately upon ourselves. One of the happiest men I know is a crippled street flower seller in London and one of the most miserable is a millionaire.

I think, indeed, that it is more difficult for the rich man to preserve the joys of home than it is to the relatively poor man. I have strayed into great houses which are as coldly impersonal as hotels; miserable, bleak inhuman places compared with a certain little house in Poplar where I once lived, a house where kindness and affection are the only riches.

A home is not made by outward show of any sort, but by love and tolerance and good humour and courtesy and the laughter of children.

In the poorest homes you will discover these qualities, but they do not come there by accident. They are the products of unselfishness and courage and loyalty.

"Better is a dinner of herbs where love is," says the psalmist, "than a stalled ox and hatred therewith." A wise man. I think he wrote that by his own fireside.