
LETTER ON WATERING-PLACES.

SIR,

I AM a country gentleman, and enjoy an estate in Northamptonshire, which formerly enabled its possessors to assume some degree of consequence in the country; but which, for several generations, has been growing less, only because it has not grown bigger. I mean, that though I have not yet been obliged to mortgage my land, or fell my timber, its relative value is every day diminishing by the prodigious influx of wealth, real and artificial, which for some time past has been pouring into this kingdom. Hitherto, however, I have found my income equal to my wants. It has enabled me to inhabit a good house in town for four months of the year, and to reside amongst my tenants and neighbours for the remaining eight with credit and hospitality. I am indeed myself so fond of the country, and so averse in my nature to every thing of hurry and bustle, that, if I consulted only my own taste, I should never feel a wish to leave the shelter of my own oaks in the dreariest season of the year; but I looked upon our annual visit to London as a proper compliance

with the gayer disposition of my wife, and the natural curiosity of the younger part of the family: besides, to say the truth, it had its advantages in avoiding a round of dinners and card-parties, which we must otherwise have engaged in for the winter season, or have been branded with the appellation of unsociable. Our journey gave me an opportunity of furnishing my study with some new books and prints; and my wife of gratifying her neighbours with some ornamental trifles, before their value was sunk by becoming common, or of producing at her table or in her furniture some new-invented refinement of fashionable elegance. Our hall was the first that was lighted by an Argand lamp; and I still remember how we were gratified by the astonishment of our guests, when my wife with an audible voice called to the footman for the tongs to help to the asparagus with. We found it pleasant too to be enabled to talk of capital artists and favourite actors; and I made the better figure in my political debates from having heard the most popular speakers in the House.

Once too, to recruit my wife's spirits after a tedious confinement from a lying-in, we passed a season at Bath. In this manner, therefore, things went on very well in the main, till of late my family have discovered that we lead a very dull kind of life; and that it is impossible to exist with

comfort, or indeed to enjoy a tolerable share of health, without spending good part of every summer at a Watering-place. I held out as long as I could. One may be allowed to resist the plans of dissipation, but the plea of health cannot decently be withstood.

It was soon discovered that my eldest daughter wanted bracing; and my wife had a bilious complaint, against which our family physician declared that sea-bathing would be particularly serviceable. Therefore, though it was my own private opinion that my daughter's nerves might have been as well braced by morning rides upon the Northamptonshire hills as by evening dances in the public rooms, and that my wife's bile would have been greatly lessened by compliance with her husband, I acquiesced; and preparations were made for our journey. These indeed were but slight, for the chief gratification proposed in this scheme was, an entire freedom from care and form. We should find every thing requisite in our lodgings; it was of no consequence whether the rooms we should occupy for a few months in the summer were elegant or not; the simplicity of a country life would be the more enjoyed by the little shifts we should be put to; and all necessaries would be provided in our lodgings. It was not therefore till after we had taken them, that we discovered how far ready-furnished lodg-

ings were from affording every article in the catalogue of necessaries. We did not indeed give them a very scrupulous examination; for the place was so full, that when we arrived, late at night, and tired with our journey, all the beds at the inn were taken up, and an easy-chair and a carpet were all the accommodations we could obtain for our repose. The next morning, therefore, we eagerly engaged the first lodgings we found vacant, and have ever since been disputing about the terms, which from the hurry were not sufficiently ascertained; and it is not even yet settled whether the little blue garret, which serves us as a powdering room, is ours of right or by favour. The want of all sorts of conveniences is a constant excuse for the want of all order and neatness, which is so visible in our apartment; and we are continually lamenting that we are obliged to buy things of which we have such plenty at home.

It is my misfortune that I can do nothing without all my little conveniences about me; and in order to write a common letter I must have my study-table to lean my elbows on in sedentary luxury; you will judge therefore how little I am able to employ my leisure, when I tell you, that the only room they have been able to allot for my use is so filled and crowded with my daughters' hat-boxes, bandboxes, wig-boxes, &c., that I can scarcely move about in it, and am at this moment

writing upon a spare trunk for want of a table. I am therefore driven to saunter about with the rest of the party: but instead of the fine clumps of trees and waving fields of corn I have been accustomed to have before my eyes, I see nothing but a naked beach, almost without a tree, exposed by turns to the cutting eastern blast and the glare of a July sun, and covered with a sand equally painful to the eyes and to the feet. The ocean is indeed an object of unspeakable grandeur; but when it has been contemplated in a storm and in a calm, when we have seen the sun rise out of its bosom and the moon silver its extended surface, its variety is exhausted, and the eye begins to require the softer and more interesting scenes of cultivated nature. My family have indeed been persuaded several times to enjoy the sea still more, by engaging in a little sailing-party; but as, unfortunately, Northamptonshire has not afforded them any opportunity of becoming seasoned sailors, these parties of pleasure are always attended with the most dreadful sickness. This likewise I am told is very good for the constitution: it may be so for aught I know; but I confess I am apt to imagine that taking an emetic at home would be equally salutary, and I am sure it would be more decent. Nor can I help imagining that my youngest daughter's lover has been less assiduous since he has contemplated her in the inde-

licate situation of a ship-cabin. I have endeavoured to amuse myself with the company, but without much success; it consists of a few very great people, who make a set by themselves, and think they are entitled, by the freedom of a watering-place, to indulge themselves in all manner of *polissonneries*; and the rest is a motley group of sharpers, merchants' clerks, kept-mistresses, idle men, and nervous women. I have been accustomed to be nice in my choice of acquaintance, especially for my family; but the greater part of our connexions here are such as we should be ashamed to acknowledge anywhere else; and the few we have seen above ourselves will equally disclaim us when we meet in town next winter. As to the settled inhabitants of the place, all who do not get by us view us with dislike, because we raise the price of provisions; and those who do,—which, in one way or other, comprehends all the lower class,—have lost every trace of rural simplicity, and are versed in all arts of low cunning and chicane. The spirit of greediness and rapacity is nowhere so conspicuous as in lodging-houses. At our seat in the country, our domestic concerns went on as by clock-work; a quarter of an hour in a week settled the bills, and few tradesmen wished, and none dared, to practise any imposition where all were known, and the consequence of their different behaviour must have been their being

marked, for life, for encouragement or for distrust. But here the continual fluctuation of company takes away all regard to character: the most respectable and ancient families have no influence any further than as they scatter their ready cash; and neither gratitude nor respect are felt where there is no bond of mutual attachment besides the necessities of the present day. I should be happy if we had only to contend with this spirit during our present excursion, but the effect it has upon servants is most pernicious. Our family used to be remarkable for having its domestics grow grey in its service, but this expedition has already corrupted them; two we have this evening parted with, and the rest have learned so much of the tricks of their station, that we shall be obliged to discharge them as soon as we return home. In the country I had been accustomed to do good to the poor: there are charities here too;—we have joined in a subscription for a crazy poetess, a raffle for the support of a sharper, who passes under the title of a German count, and a benefit-play for a *gentleman* on board the hulks. Unfortunately, to balance these various expenses, this place, which happens to be a great resort of smugglers, affords daily opportunities of making *bargains*. We drink spoiled teas, under the idea of their being cheap; and the little room we have is made less by the reception of cargoes of India

taffetas, shawl-muslins, and real chintzes. All my authority here would be exerted in vain; for (I do not know whether you know it or no) the buying of a bargain is a temptation which it is not in the nature of any woman to resist. I am in hopes, however, the business may receive some little check from an incident which happened a little time since: an acquaintance of ours, returning from Margate, had his carriage seized by the Custom-house officers, on account of a piece of silk which one of his female cousins, without his knowledge, had stowed in it; and it was only released by its being proved that what she had bought with so much satisfaction as contraband, was in reality the home-bred manufacture of Spitalfields.

My family used to be remarkable for regularity in their attendance on public worship; but that too here is numbered amongst the amusements of the place. Lady Huntingdon has a chapel, which sometimes attracts us; and when nothing promises us any particular entertainment, a tea-drinking at the Rooms, or a concert of what is called sacred music, is sufficient to draw us from a church where no one will remark either our absence or our presence. Thus we daily become more lax in our conduct, for want of the salutary restraint imposed upon us by the consciousness of being looked up to as an example by others.

In this manner, sir, has the season passed away. I spend a great deal of money, and make no figure; I am in the country, and see nothing of country simplicity or country occupations; I am in an obscure village, and yet cannot stir out without more observers than if I were walking in St. James's Park; I am cooped up in less room than my own dog-kennel, while my spacious halls are injured by standing empty; and I am paying for tasteless unripe fruit, while my own choice wall-fruit is rotting by bushels under the trees.—In recompense for all this, we have the satisfaction of knowing that we occupy the very rooms which my Lord — had just quitted; of picking up anecdotes, true or false, of people in high life; and of seizing the ridicule of every character as they pass by us in the moving show-glass of the place,—a pastime which often affords us a good deal of mirth, but which, I confess, I can never join in without reflecting that what is our amusement is theirs likewise. As to the great ostensible object of our excursion,—health, I am afraid we cannot boast of much improvement. We have had a wet and cold summer; and these houses, which are either old tenements vamped up, or new ones slightly run up for the accommodation of bathers during the season, have more contrivances for letting in the cooling breezes than for keeping them out, a circumstance which I should presume sagacious physicians do not always at-

tend to, when they order patients from their own warm, compact, substantial houses, to take the air in country lodgings; of which the best apartments, during the winter, have only been inhabited by the rats, and where the poverty of the landlord prevents him from laying out more in repairs than will serve to give them a showy and attractive appearance. Be that as it may; the rooms we at present inhabit are so pervious to the breeze, that in spite of all the ingenious expedients of listing doors, pasting paper on the inside of cupboards, laying sand-bags, puttying crevices, and condemning closet-doors; it has given me a severe touch of my old rheumatism; and all my family are in one way or other affected with it: my eldest daughter too has got cold with her bathing, though the sea-water never gives any body cold!

In answer to these complaints, I am told by the good company here that I have stayed too long in the same air, and that now I ought to take a trip to the continent, and spend the winter at Nice, which would complete the business. I am entirely of their opinion, that it *would* complete the business, and have therefore taken the liberty of laying my case before you; and am, sir,

Yours, &c.

HENRY HOMELove.