THE HOUSE IN THE SUN: ILLUSTRATED BY PAINTINGS AND DRAWINGS OF CARL LARSSON: BY GARDNER TEALL

Editor's Note.—The line drawings used to illustrate this article are all from sketches made by Carl Larsson of his family at work and play.

This is the story of a house, its master, its mistress, the little children that gladden its threshold, of those who serve them in the loyal spirit of affectionate and grateful attachment, and of the bond which holds all together in that blessed contentment symbolized by the work of every member of the household. The world concerns itself today with the overemphasis of the personality of the individual as a thing apart from almost every attachment that is not adventuresome, as a consequence of which the traditions of the old patriarchal idea, in its happy modifications, would become dim to the present era but for the persistence, throughout the centuries, of the ultimate yearning in every man's heart for home and family, a tradition we have to thank Germany, among nations, for keeping the least obscured, and in exemplary freshness.

In the Swedish Northland there is a quiet village, Sunborn by name, where dwells a great painter whose name has come to be well known in Europe, but of whom little has been heard in America, because his works have never reached here; this painter is Carl Larsson. Shortly after his marriage, nearly thirty years ago, he journeyed with his father-in-law to Dalarna, whither the latter was traveling to inspect an estate, near his old homestead, for which he was negotiating. Making a short detour they went out of their way to pay a visit to two maiden sisters of the father-in-law, who dwelt in a little, ugly, tumble-down old house, before which a few birches and an unkempt growth of elder bushes sprang out of a mere handful of clayey soil, through which a path led from their door to Sunbornsbach, a little stream that encircled the premises. There the young student found a decaying landing dock and a worthless water-logged old boat, that lent forlornness to the rundown vestige of the exterior of the place. With forebodings he entered the house with his father, almost dreading to meet the deaf old ladies whom Karin Bergöö had told him about when she became his wife. But inside he found all spick and span, and almost it seemed as though the dear little old ladies had spent so much of their time keeping the house and its heirlooms of fine old furniture free from the breath of dust or the tread of a fly that they had grown oblivious to all else. "It is a wonderful old house!" said the young Carl to himself, and then he sighed to think what a shame it was the sisters had never had husbands who would have kept things outside as trimly as their thrift had directed.
MY FAMILY: FROM A PAINTING BY CARL LARSSON.
THE CHRISTMAS DINNER IN THE HOUSE IN THE SUN: FROM A PAINTING BY CARL LARSSON.
"IN THE KITCHEN": FROM A PAINTING BY CARL LARSSON, SHOWING TWO OF HIS CHILDREN, ONE MAKING BUTTER.

THE ARTIST’S FAMILY HAVING SUPPER OUT-OF-DOORS: FROM A PAINTING BY CARL LARSSON.
the interior ordering of their abode. “Father-in-law,” whispered Carl, “how beautiful this might have been! Hear the wind in those birches outside the door! A little care would restore everything. See, how wonderfully the aunts have kept everything indoors!” “They have been lonely, my sisters,” reflected the elder, sadly. “Ah, yes,” cried the son, “there should have been children!” The father looked at him, thoughtfully. “This old house has made an impression upon you,” he said. “Yes,” replied the young man, “never in my whole life have I seen a place that seemed so truly a refuge from the noise and whirl of the great world outside. Only once has this feeling come over me before; that was in an old French farmhouse, but this is far more wonderful!”

Nothing more was said. A year later one of the sisters died; the other dreaded the loneliness, and, to the joy of his children, a letter came to them one morning from father Bergöö with the news that he had bought the house at Sunborn for them from his sister, so that is the story of how they came to live in “The House in the Sun.”

Suzanne was the first born, and then came Ulf and Pontus, and Lisbeth, and Brita, and baby Kersti. What a new life it was for Aunt Emma, and strange to say, she did not seem to mind at all seeing the grim old place where she and her sister had spent many noiseless years turned into a tuneful paradise of happy babies. Robert Louis Stevenson once said that his idea of a man’s chief employment was to enrich the world with things of beauty, and to have a fairly good time while doing it. Carl Larsson’s idea seems not to have been far from Stevenson’s. In a very short time indeed he and his young wife, Karin, had transformed the aspect of Sunborn, he with his art, she with her housewifery; both with that inborn love of home and family that was to make their life and the lives of those around them full to the brim with the happiness of contentment, it did not take them long to convert the lonely house by the Sunborn stream into the joyful dwelling they called “The House in the Sun.” The trodden earth was broken afresh, lawns planted, the old trees trimmed, neglected hedgerows restored to proper growth, a new path made to the waterside, free from the old stumps that would have tripped up little feet, and a new boat landing built for the spick and span skiff the village boatemaker’s skill produced. There was the garden to be made, a garden of lovely old-fashioned flowers, zinnias, hollyhocks, sunflowers, marigolds, pinks and wonderful dahlias. After that the old orchard, scarcely the ghost of its former self was restored to a useful existence for years still to come—thorns gave way to apple blossoms. Would that good father Bergöö had lived to see all these wonderful works which his gift had inspired!
DAY after day painter Larsson worked with the carpenter folk from the village. If they looked dubious and shook heads, he would draw wonderful little sketches for them to ponder over, and then if they still failed to consider his ideas possible he would convince them by taking saw and hammer in hand, for if he could paint a masterpiece he could also cut a board in two and hammer a nail in straight. Little by little the castle in the air became the wonderful “House in the Sun.”

Thither the traveler, alighting at Falun, might chance to find his way if he had the good fortune to count himself Carl Larsson’s friend and guest. The old-fashioned equipage, driven by the faithful Johann, would whirl him through a lovely Swedish landscape, bringing him at last to Dalarna. With a crack of his whip Johann drives you up to the veranda; you jump out and are met by your host, your hostess and their little sons and daughters. But you find it hard to mount the stairs to the guest chamber without pausing to look around you at the painted walls. Everywhere, everything bears the personal touch of the artist. He has put sunlight into paint, and joyfulness into form, and you discover that you are in such a house as never have you dreamed existed. Over the door is the friendly legend in Swedish:

“Be welcome, dear thou,
By Carl Larsson and Frau.”

Hastily you set yourself to rights, for downstairs you know they are waiting to welcome you to their board. Savory odors are just to be whiffed as a little gusty breeze sweeps through the house from the great kitchen. Even this lure to the luscious feast that awaits you hardly drags you away from your delightful...
MR. LARSSON'S FAMILY POSING FOR A TABLEAU VIVANTE: FROM A DRAWING BY CARL LARSSON.
MOTHER'S ANNIVERSARY. made his house great art, his art great
in his home," and you are eager to look further. On your way downstairs you will pass the cupboard which ingeniously hides the pump device to protect the house in case of fire. At one side on a hook above it hangs an alarm bell and a key to the hose closet. Suzanne, Ulf, Pontus and Lisbeth, as the pioneer members of the voluntary fire department, have their proud honor indicated by their several portraits done by father Carl in his most masterly manner. Indeed,

GRANDMOTHER AND KERSTI. every stroke of his brush is in his most masterly manner, as though he had been Giotto working on Assisan walls or Perugino adorning the Cambio of his native town. Carl Larsson has his art at his fingertips, and if they move rapidly they move surely and with the certain artistry of a Frans Hals. Therefore every stroke of his brush, every picture and every design in "The House of the Sun" has been accomplished with a spiritful conscientiousness that only the old masters and builders knew. It is the man who has helped to build his home who best enjoys it.
YOU look around the dining room and wonder if the abode of the heroes of some old saga has not here found reincarnation. A great table stands in the paneled room, and over in the corner is a quaint old chimney hood. You know now that the ancient phrase "chimney-corner" has some claim to verity after all. Instinctively you wish you could be here for a Christmas feast, when all the best things in the house are brought out, the row of cups, each bearing the name of a member of the family, the dishes that have been designed by the artist, or by his friends for him, and the great candlesticks that then only grace the board. Already your eyes are resting on some exquisite plates which hang on the wall, and you are told they were painted for Frau Larsson by another of Sweden's famous masters of the brush, Bruno Liljefors. On the wall may be hanging a sketch in color of one of your host's jolliest paintings, "Brita and I." The inspiration for this picture came one day when Brita was being given a shoulder ride. Plunk! Father Carl and daughter Brita found themselves face to face with Aunt Emma's old mirror, now moved to a happier place, empaneled in a more cheerful wall. "Oh, my picture, papa!" cried Brita, whereupon Papa Larsson seized his pencil, and with much skilful manoeuvring to keep little Brita from tumbling off, the lines for the final water color now in the Göteborgs Museum were caught. That is just how Carl Larsson does nearly everything. He recognizes a motif, and presto, it is his!

Sunborn brook is swimming with lively fish and you will have a mess of them for breakfast, which the lines of Ulf and Pontus have succeeded in coaxing forth. Perhaps they will take you for a boat ride. Papa Carl has drawn them rowing, and has painted and etched them thus many times. If the day has been fine there will have been breakfast out in the yard under the old
birches, with bluebirds singing overhead. Then you will see one of the little maidens at her piano practice in the living room, Suzanne mounting a chair to restore a faded bit of frieze to its pristine glory. Ulf and Pontus marched off to their lessons, Lisbeth to the kitchen for a cookery lesson, Kersti to water the plants; or perhaps you will find Ulf off for a ride with his pony Lisa, or all of the children in the great work room where the boys have their carpenter and carving benches, the girls a weaving loom and a sewing machine. Indoors or out the Larsson children lead the busy useful lives they have been taught by their wonderful father and mother, who have opened to them the treasure of true happiness. But well they know playtime, too! "The House in the Sun" ever resounds with frolic and laughter. Often the children take turns at theatricals, with indoor or outdoor stage as the occasion demands. They act their own plays or perhaps a friendly poet on a visit will help them to a work especially written for some such auspicious occasion as token of his entering into the spirit of the lives they lead. Even Papa Carl does not think the matter of designing costumes unworthy his talent. He always helps on the great feast days, the birthdays, or mother's and father's anniversary. Then the ceremonies are delightful indeed, days to look forward to, days never to be forgotten.

And with it all Carl Larsson finds time to accomplish great works to send into the outside world. I fancy the outside world wants them, though it may not know it, because they breathe with the fresh spirit that is born in the life of "The House in the Sun."