

A House and Garden of Wonders

By F. E. EMMOTT

IT is just an ordinary looking house upon an Idle street, ordinary, that is, except for a gold painted door. Under an archway can be seen a garden beyond, but at first glance it appears an ordinary garden. Not until you have knocked at the golden door and made the acquaintance of Mr. John Simpson, the owner, do you see that Thorpe Cottage, Idle, the house in question, is entirely unusual and well worth a visit.

You enter the hall and find fearsome Chinese pictures upon the wall, one of no less a person than a Lord High Executioner. Noting the frieze, in Tudor style, you pass into the lounge by old oak Jacobean doors, and are able to sit in Cromwellian and Tudor chairs with a Jacobean table opposite. If you are fond of old furniture and pottery there is plenty of it both there and in the dining-room, but if you would rather see Egyptian relics Mr. Simpson has plenty for you in his library, a fascinating museum in miniature.

It would be hard to mention every individual treasure to be found here. I saw a small cupboard which alone contains enough to form the nucleus of an exhibition of ancient Eastern relics, containing as it does the figures of Egyptian gods, a Grecian tear jug, and old implements of a civilisation of 4,000 years ago. One of the most interesting exhibits is a Peruvian bowl 6,000 years old, which for workmanship was incomparably superior to a similar one made by Egyptians 2,000 years later. It would seem that the Egyptian is not the oldest civilisation known, as is generally assumed.

Mr. Simpson showed me an inlaid representation of the Alhambra. Of Moorish workmanship, it was a treat to the eye. He next took out a box of old flint and bronze weapons, together with mummy cloth containing human hair over 3,000 years old. Of greater interest even than these were copies of "The Times," one for 7 November, 1805, announcing the victory at Trafalgar and the death of Nelson, the other dated 22 June, 1815, and containing a report of Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo.

A WARDEN'S NOTEBOOK.

I was considerably amused at some of the entries in an old notebook which he next showed me. It belonged to one of the wardens of the old Idle Parish Church and goes back to 1794. Faded though the writing is, it is still readable. Some of the entries are worth quoting, as follows:—

- June 22.—Fresh parson, 1s.
- August 1st.—Wine at Idle, 6s. 9d.
- Dec. 23.—Scouel winders menden, 1s. 9d.; Neu almenack, 9d.
- Dec. 9.—Bought a cow at Bradford of John Smith, price £5 12s. 6d.
- Nov. 2.—Receefed at the comunien at Idle, 4s. 9d.; Serples weshin and menden, and bread for comunien, 3s.; Paid Thos. Coulthous for fetling chapel, 2s. 6d.
- September 26.—Thomas Coultos, Britches and hatt, 10s. 6d.; Coit maken, 5s. 6d.

Later there comes a rather pathetic entry, for we find written across the page the words, "My Mother dided, March 13, 1804."

There are many more treasures in this little library, but after a glance at them I was compelled to leave them if I wanted to give enough attention to the garden, surely one of the most marvellous pieces of ground in Yorkshire. Almost every inch of it contains something wonderful, quaint, beautiful, or ancient. When Mr. Simpson first came to the house, 19 years ago, the garden was a mere yard. He pulled down a wall or two that were in it, and also a small shed, and resolved to make a thing of beauty out of it. He has succeeded.

TREASURES OF A GARDEN.

All over are objects of interest. In one corner is a wooden eagle standing on the wall, in the middle is a small pond over which a plaster pelican, with a fish in his mouth, keeps an eternal watch. At the corner stands "The Pagoda," a shelter, the wall of which is set with shells and stones from various parts of the world. On one side is a shell from John O' Groats, and opposite it one from Land's End.

Mr. Simpson knows every stone in his garden, and pointed out an inconspicuous object which he said was a Roman tile, while afterwards he took me round and pointed out innumerable small faces cleverly fixed in crevices in the wall. Dolls' faces and carved images were there in abundance, but Mr. Simpson is good at this kind of work, for he also specialises in growing plants in stone, and showed me a great variety of plants so produced. In one little piece of earth, 3ft. by 2ft., he was growing no less than 134 varieties of plant or flower, and it was the same all over the garden, which is really tropical in its richness. There is money awaiting the man or woman who can come to it on any day in the year and not find a flower growing in it.

Many ornamental stones and columns came from the old Idle Wesleyan School, which was pulled down ten years or so ago. Others came from other old churches or chapels since demolished. He has brought to a fine art the fitting of an old pillar or ornamental stone on to the top of a wall, and has built a complete terrace by using such stones, and placing a lion and a unicorn in the centre.

There is no doubt that Mr. Simpson has achieved a triumph in changing an ordinary house into a palace of wonders, but with all his love of the antique and the quaint he has not forgotten the need of the modern housewife. Mrs. Simpson has everything in the way of electric domestic help that a woman could want, and 170 years old though the house is, its kitchen boasts an electric sewing machine, an electric oven, cooker, and water boiler, and other such domestic utensils. I cannot help wishing I lived in such a house.