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ON BUNGALOWS – XII

Leaving the purely constructive detail of bungalow building for the present, much of which is, of course, common to ordinary houses, it will be of advantage to consider how such buildings come to be introduced here, and what general arrangement of plan was considered appropriate to them in the first instance.

Now that small quantities of freehold land, chiefly by the seaside, may be picked up at any of the land sales so freely advertised, the run on bungalows ought to be great, for they are especially suitable for summer residences, though they may be built so as to afford a comfortable shelter all the year round. The first English bungalow was built at Westgate-on-Sea by Mr. John Taylor, architect, and this, duplicated, formed the nucleus of the present town, which is not quite forty years old.

Mr. Taylor lived in his bungalow until he found a purchaser, Professor Sir Erasmus Wilson, and having realised a profit by the sale, he built others in the same locality, until, finding difficulty in procuring land at Westgate, he moved to Birchington, about 1½ miles further west, and continued building the same style of house there. John Taylor was an architect in the true sense of the word – that is, he was both designer and master builder, for he lived at Birchington in contact with his workmen; he impressed all they did with his individuality, and left a style of building particularly his own, and one very suitable to this type of house.

Taylor's style may be described, using a hackneyed expression, as "cheap and effective", but in justice it must be added that his treatment of the materials at his disposal was both original and artistic. The first bungalows were furnished by the architect; the furniture was also designed by him, and made under his superintendence, it was original, substantial, and comfortable, answering the purpose for which it was designed in every way. The floors were covered with Indian matting, chairs all made to one pattern, might be used singly, or they might be bolted together to make loungers, settees, sideboards, dressing-tables, and even bedsteads! Like the building itself, the furniture bore the impress of a fertile imagination, and the whole afforded an object lesson in the application of artistic ideas to the construction and financial necessities which beset the architect.

In giving a complete set of drawings of one of these early bungalows, it will be necessary to say that it was meant for a summer residence chiefly. The water supply was by a bucket from an open well, and the drainage was to a cesspool in the garden, some distance from the well. It will be noticed that there is no bathroom; but in such a house it would be quite unnecessary, as it stood on the edge of the cliff, and access to the sea was gained by a private staircase from the garden, the steps being cut in chalk, a material which allowed the construction of underground passages and galleries at the smallest possible cost.

No provision is made for water supply or drainage in the accompanying quantities, nor is there any for garden walks or garden walls; all these being determined by local circumstances - what would apply in one case would be inapplicable in another, so they are omitted. When a bungalow is dealt with,

where there is drainage and a water supply both will be explained, and this plan will be found more satisfactory than that of describing things which do not exist in a particular case, but which may in some other cases. In the writing of “adaptable” specifications and quantities is vanity and vexation of spirit, resulting only in a waste of time and paper. It will be noticed that the specification is partly merged into the quantities. This plan might, with great advantage be almost universally adopted, for it must be an unerring guide to the builder in estimating for work, and it would also be invaluable to the architect, clerk of works, and builder when the work is in progress.

The quantities, too, are much condensed. A good many items are taken together, and several “labour only” clauses are omitted. A door has to be painted or stained - it has also to have linings and architraves, hinges and lock. Where there are several doors all finished in the same way, there is no reason why one item should not be made of the lot, so long as the builder clearly understands this when pricing the work.

It is clear from the lists that builders do not price all the items in an “up-to-date” bill of quantities, and that they do not consult published schedules of prices. In the accompanying quantities, all brickwork is measured by the yard cube and yard superficial, because this method brings to the builder’s mind a much clearer idea of the work required than if the standard of reduced brickwork had been adopted – a purely ideal unit which exists only in the surveyor’s imagination.

If all, or nearly all, the walls in a building were brick-and-a-half thick then there might be a reason for deducing all the work to that standard; but when no single wall is that thickness, it is absurd to calculate this way. The plan of this bungalow is faulty in that there are no passages to several of the rooms. To get to a bedroom from a drawing-room or dining-room is not in itself very objectionable, but the service of a bedroom through either is well-nigh impossible. People will, however submit to some inconveniences for a few months in summer, especially when they add to the novelty of the situation. However a permanent residence with such an arrangement is almost out of the question.

