

Sunbourn

When I first came to live in England I stayed with my friends, Sir Graham Greene, K.C.B., and his sisters Florence, Alice, Mary and Helen at Harston House. Mary, who is an artist, had a studio in Cambridge where she taught children and young people, and she went in daily with the exception of Sundays. My work at the gymnasium where I taught Swedish gymnastics and had a clinic in Physiotherapy was also a daily occupation with the exception of Sundays. We had several modes of travelling: the train, a pony and trap, bicycle or later a small car, and we generally started out together and came back together. We were very good friends and preferred each others' company to anybody else.

It was a pleasant existence in this large and friendly household, but being a Swede, I always longed for a little place of my own. Harston House lies low, surrounded by a beautiful garden with heavy trees which shut out both light and air, and I often felt the solemnity of the large dark house, especially in the late summer when the heavy greenery prevented even a breath of air from playing in the garden and house. My walks took me often up the hill past the windmill on to Newton. Land was very precious in these days and jealously owned by the great landowners and it was not an easy thing to find a plot, where to build. I used to look at the fields round about and there was one small

lonely field owned by an old man in another village. One day this land was up for sale. I asked the local builder to bid for me at the sale. He thought I ought to go up to £80, but no further. However, someone bought it for a few pounds more. I was sadly disappointed, sent the builder to offer the man who had bought it £100. He was very glad to get rid of it and thus the field on the Newton Hill became mine. I was very happy and I used to go up and look at the view which delighted me. The towers of the Catholic Church and pinnacles of Kings could be seen on a clear day and at eventide, one could hear the peal of many village churches. I was happy and proud of my possession. I ~~enjoyed~~ engaged an old gardener, Mr. Bowyer (who had been a coachman at the Hall at Newton and had learnt polite manners), to come and prepare the garden. The garden was planned like the flag of St. George, the red cross formed the general paths. Of the two smaller fields in the flag one was ornamental with roses in a set arrangement of borders, and the other full of flowering shrubs. Of the further larger fields, one was devoted to the house and kitchen-garden, the other had a tennis court and an orchard.

After the war I went on a skiing expedition to the Austrian Tyrol and fell in love with the beautiful chalets that everybody lived in. The balconies, the shutters and the low-pitched over-hanging roof was to me a delight and a

young architect made me a sketch of how he would plan a somewhat modernized chalet. I brought this delightful sketch home to the village builder and told him that I would like him to build me a house like the sketch. He must have engaged some draughtsman to draw it in builders' proportions. I was a little disappointed at the high pitched roof that I was told was necessary in England, but otherwise the plan looked very much like my sketch, and in stages with much waiting and heart searchings I saw my future home rise on the horizon. When the workmen had raised the roof beams, I had a Scandinavian feast (taköl) and a wreath was hung to the roof beam to flutter in the wind and the workmen, my friends at Harston House, and the builder all sat down at a trestle table with a white tablecloth in the place where the present drawingroom is, and we had tea and lovely cakes. I had arranged this for 5 o'clock, thinking it would be when the men had finished their work: one of the men with a strong socialistic bias, said that it ought to be earlier and not at the time when they were free to go home after their day's work. I felt a little sad, because I was hoping the men might have looked upon it as a pleasure to be chosen in their own time. However, it all went off well and we had a snapshot taken of the house at that stage. Painfully slowly were one thing after another added on. Finally, the house was built and the outside walls of the upper story were lined with wood, whilst the lower

was plastered. The wood lining was stained dark and the shutters with a heart-shaped hole in the centre were painted bright green. The windows had leaded panes and the window frames were painted white. There was one chimney and this was copied from one of the beautiful old chimneys at Harston House. The bricklayer was a skilled man and he and the builder decided to build the walls with an air space inside so as to make them warm and dry. I was very nervous all the time and rather disappointed at the slipshod way the woodwork was done. Looking back at it now, 25 years later, I believe that the work was not too bad by present standards. The builder went bankrupt during the time the house was built and I fear that he tried to scheme how to build at the cheapest rate, whilst I had to pay a good deal more than was originally arranged. The increased cost I believe is usual and in many ways I was luckier had I known it then,, then when later on I had an addition put up by another builder under the supervision of an architect.

My little house was very compact and snug. There were three bedrooms and a bathroom upstairs and a hall, drawing room and kitchen dining room downstairs. I think at that stage the house was really very attractive, but when driving from the station end of Newton Road up on to the hill, the house looked with its balconies silhouetted on each side, as if the base was inadequate, in fact in damp weather the house seemed to float above the ground. I asked the architect, who added on a side-wing some seven years later, to tie my little

Noah's Ark to the ground. Architecturally this addition was not successful but I had the useful addition of a kitchen proper and a scullery and maid's bathroom downstairs and two bedrooms upstairs.

I desired to build my house and leave the Greene family partly on account of my two nieces whom I was bringing up in England. The Greene family were devoted to the children but when later their parents and brothers and sisters wanted to visit us, it would have swamped even the large house at Harston House and so one fine day we moved in on to the house on the hill.

Well, then came the worry of what to call it. It was sunny and bright, the house in the sun, ^{and} ~~yet~~ that reminded me of Carl Larson's house, the Swedish painter. His house is called Sundborn, and Rolf Steffenburg, a Swedish friend, to whom I was more or less engaged, when I lived in Sweden, came from an estate near Falun called Sundborn. So with these associations I changed the name slightly and called it "Sunbourn".

The children loved their new home and thrived in the sun and wind. At times it was very windy and the wind was howling and sweeping round the pillars holding the balconies. It reminded us of the wind on the North Sea on our passage by boat on journeys to Sweden. So we spoke of the wind that sailed our little ship out into the unknown and the children and I loved the sound of the wind and felt excited. We always had our balcony doors opened however strong a wind and the curtains

sometimes stood straight out into the room in a horizontal fashion. On calm evenings in the summer the owls used to love to come and sit on the balcony handrails and send out their melancholy cry. I did not like that, so I tried to frighten them by sending out a lion's roar from my bed. It did not worry the owls, but my ^{two} little girls came into me quite worried and asked me if I was ill! I think they were very frightened, so they had to creep in and share my bed for a while until they felt "comfy" again. I had two Swedish young girls to help me run the house and look after the children. We tried to keep Swedish customs as much as possible. At Christmas we made the various kinds of breads, ryebread, sweetened malt bread and white bread. We had the "dip", a kind of traditional dish where you boil ham, salt beef, and pork sausages. These are lifted out of the pan and cut and eaten together with slices of the Yule bread which you dip in the cauldron sometimes raised on a tripod on an open fire. You have specially made mustard and you drink mead. (The mead we made from a mixture of stout, light beer, aerated cider and a little port). At Easter we used to hide chocolate eggs in the garden for the children to hunt. At Midsummer we raised the traditional "May-pole". The pole, which should be as tall as possible, is covered with greenery and wild flowers bound to it with string. Near the top, crossed arms are nailed or tied on to the pole, from which hang wreaths of gay flowers. On the very top we put a little

Swedish flag.

Swedish friends and students came out from
Cambridge to celebrate this festival with us. Coffee with
Swedish cakes were offered and all danced on the grass round
the pole.

S. E. Hansen

1944-1945.