THE REVIVAL OF ENGLISH DOMESTIC ARCHITECTURE. VI. THE WORK OF MR. C. F. A. VOYSEY.

THE former chapters on the revival of English domestic architecture have been devoted to the work of men long since recognised as masters, and have embraced palaces and mansions as well as houses for people of moderate incomes. But the work of Mr. C. F. A. Voysey to be considered here belongs to quite another order. For it is no exaggeration to say that some of the entirely delightful houses he has called into being would compare favourably in cost with the miserable shams of the jerry-builder. To beat the vulgar and badly constructed dwelling—on economic as

HOUSE AT FRENSHAM — C. F. A. VOYSEY, ARCHITECT

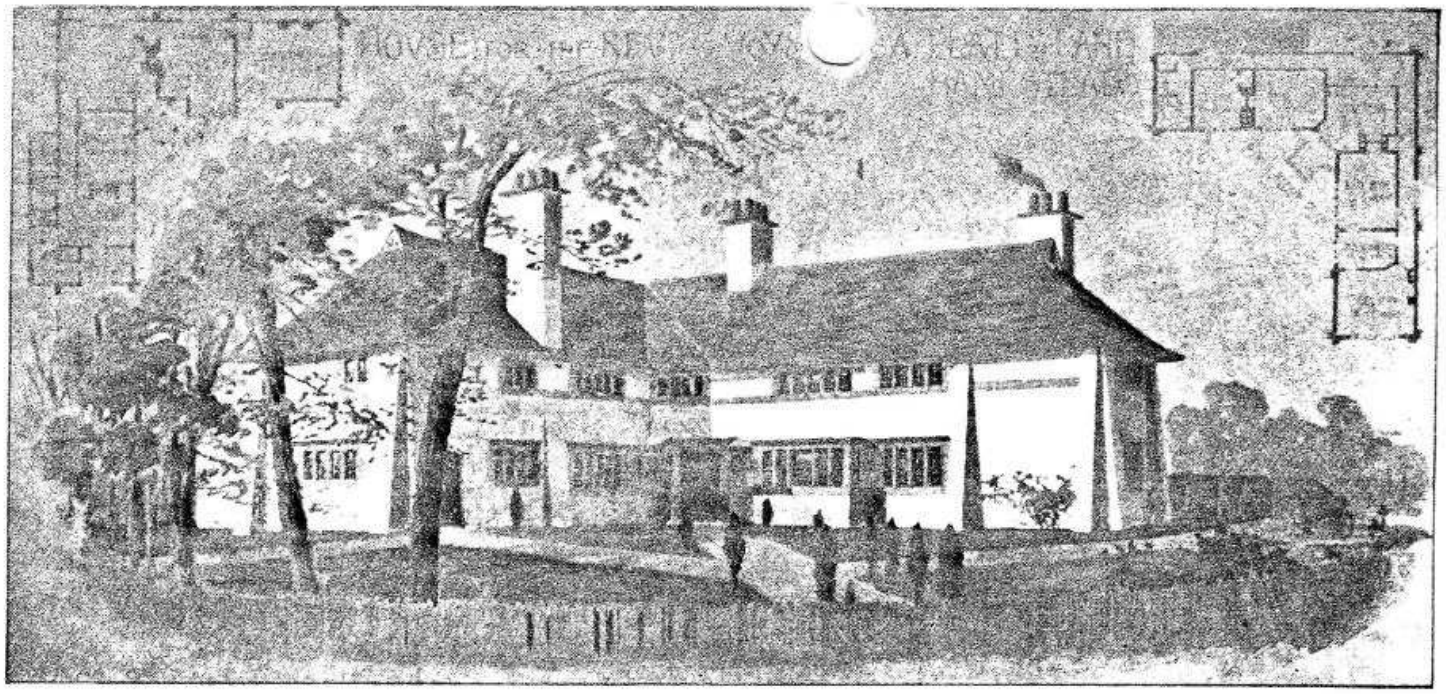
HOUSE AT CASTLE MORTON, WORCESTERSHIRE — C. F. A. VOYSEY, ARCHITECT

(From a photograph by H. J. L. Massé)

well as artistic grounds—is a notable achievement. But that Mr. Voysey has done it more than once remains as abiding evidence that art may not only be obedient to the demands of common sense, but that it is able to use worthy materials honestly, and give you a lasting structure as cheaply as the most scamping rival could produce it. This is doubtless due to the fact that Mr. Voysey in such a building almost entirely ignores ornament, especially of the sort that is applied so lavishly to distract attention from faulty workmanship and unsound material.

It is often the plaint of poor but artistic house-builders, that lack of money obliges them to forego beautiful things. This is a fallacy of the worst order. For it implies that beauty is a thing of decoration and non-essentials. In theory we all agree to protest against such a distorted view of beauty; but in practice, especially in architectural practice, the presence of so much superfluous, if not, possibly, bad ornament, can be attributed to no other cause. But because Mr. Voysey in almost every case hitherto, has abjured carvings, stained glass, tiles, and the ordinary items of applied decoration, it would be absurd to argue therefrom his dislike or contempt. Should he ever accept a commission to build a palace for a millionaire (and one may be sure he would not unless he had full liberty to discard the commonplace decorations of the hour) then we have no reason to suppose it would be unadorned. On the contrary, while we should find exquisite proportion and harmonious arrangement of masses his first aims, there is little doubt but that he would employ fellow craftsmen to enrich certain portions as superbly as they knew how. One sees in his furniture no reliance on mouldings or machine carvings, ormolu mountings, or other "stuck on" decorations; but all the same in hinges, escutcheons, and other portions where ornament can be used wisely, he does not shun it, but rather welcomes and amplifies it so that these few portions impart the effect of sumptuous adornment to the whole of a structure that else relies solely on good material, shaped to fine proportion.

In another context he has explained his theory of the decoration of the house. If you have really beautiful furniture, and only fine pictures, and such pieces of bric-à-brac as are entitled to be called works of art, then he counsels exquisite reticence in internal decoration. But if you must needs use unlovely ornate furniture, and fabrics

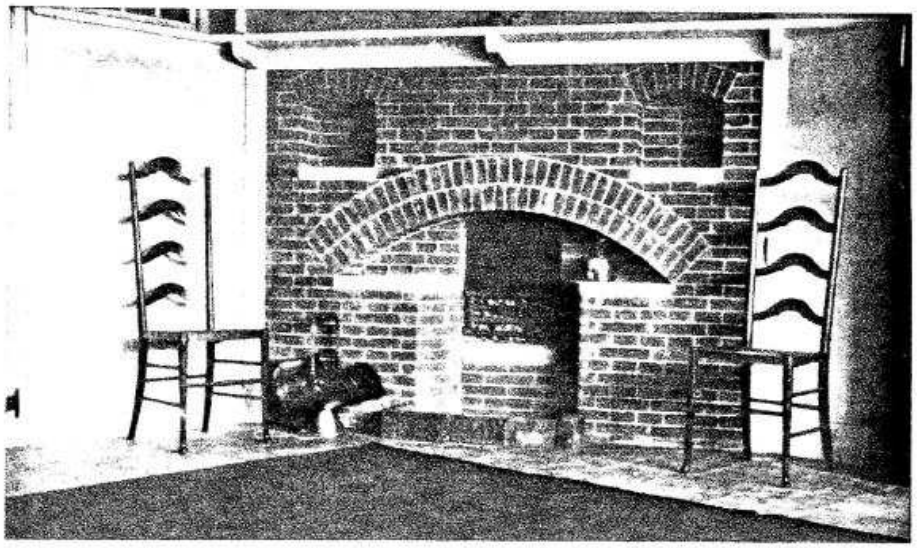


HOUSE AT HAMPSTEAD C. F. A. VOYSEY, ARCHITECT

with patterns, then he would have you unafraid to welcome pattern everywhere; so that in its very abundance you may escape the contours of badly shaped furniture sharply defined against a plain wall, or some one dominant pattern thrusting itself on you without any rivals to modify its insistent claim to be noticed.

That Mr. Voysey is fond of green painted woodwork, or of green-coloured furniture, one has heard urged against him. This is as ignoble a reason for urging against a craftsman's schemes as the ordinary slang of the "art-at-home" columns of weekly papers. There, we read lately, "green furniture is coming in again," as if it were a mode in hair-dressing, or a fabric for spring costumes. If with experience of its utility, and with full belief in its economy, you find a certain treatment for woodwork, structural or movable, better adapted than others, why for the sake of variety should you use less admirable methods?

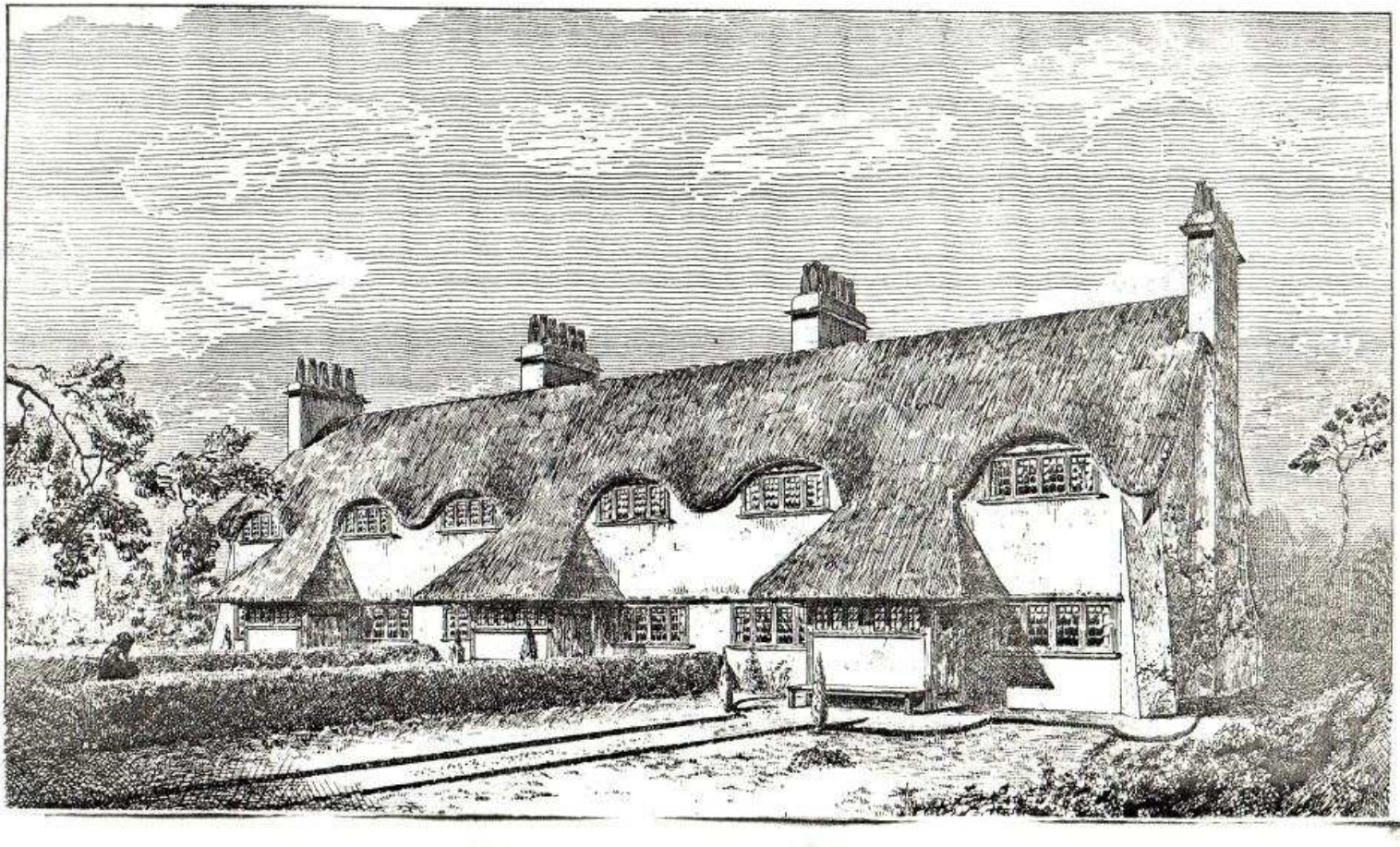
Painting in simple, pleasant colours has found its opponents at certain times. Yet the common stained deal of the mission-room Gothic, or the small vicarage, is no more honest. It is more indiscreet, but indiscretion is not necessarily truth. Mr. Voysey's doctrine of honesty is not founded on quibbles of this sort. Paint will not hide bad material, and cover up clumsy workmanship from the eye of an expert. But well applied it can give a far more pleasant surface than is likely to be obtained from cheap wood, smeared with a sticky-looking varnish.



FIREPLACE IN THE HOUSE AT FRENSHAM C. F. A. VOYSEY, ARCHITECT

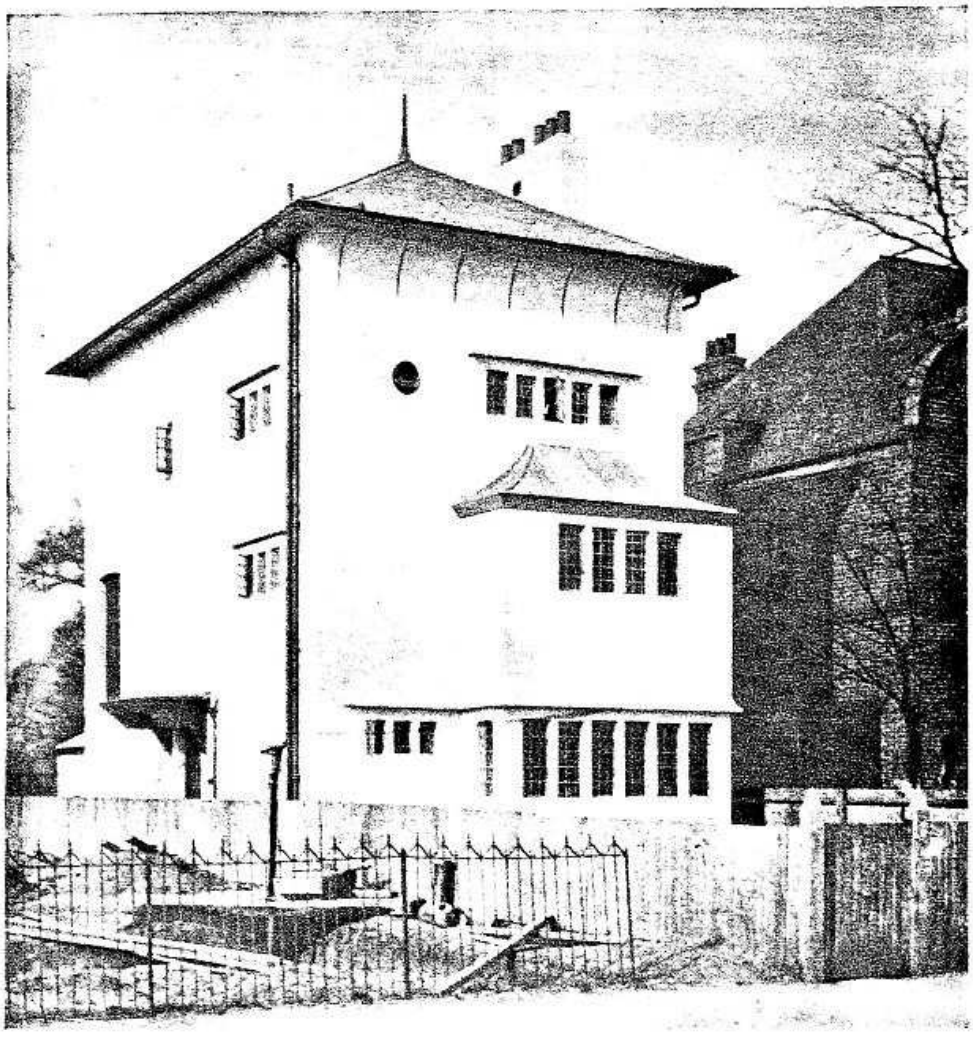
There is such a thing as sham honesty, an affectation of being superior to one's fellows in exact truth of statement, which is not far removed from hypocrisy, although it aims to be at the very opposite extreme. As, for example, in woodwork of the Early Victorian Gothic revival, where every mortice showed its keyed tenon, and buttresses, whether needed or not by the construction, were a favourite motive of applied decoration—to buildings as well as furniture.

In Mr. Voysey's designs for small houses buttresses frequently occur, but these are not used



because mediæval builders employed them, still less are they added to walls already strong enough to impart a "quaint" or "picturesque" effect. Mr. Voysey employs these buttresses to save the cost of thicker walls for the lower story of his buildings. That they chance to afford pleasant-looking shelters for a garden seat, and break up the wall-surface happily, giving the *façade* a certain architectural pattern of shadows he realises, and is, beyond doubt, delighted by the picturesque qualities which happen to result from their use. Although the fact is patent enough from study of the architect's works, it may be as well to re-state it—Mr. Voysey would no more dream of adding a superfluous buttress than he would add an unnecessary panel of cheap ornament. If, after knowledge of his designs, you still believe he is purposely eccentric, or deliberately strains after unusual effects, it does but prove how hard it is for any sincere worker to express himself that all who run may read clearly, and that those not sympathetic can realise his intentions.

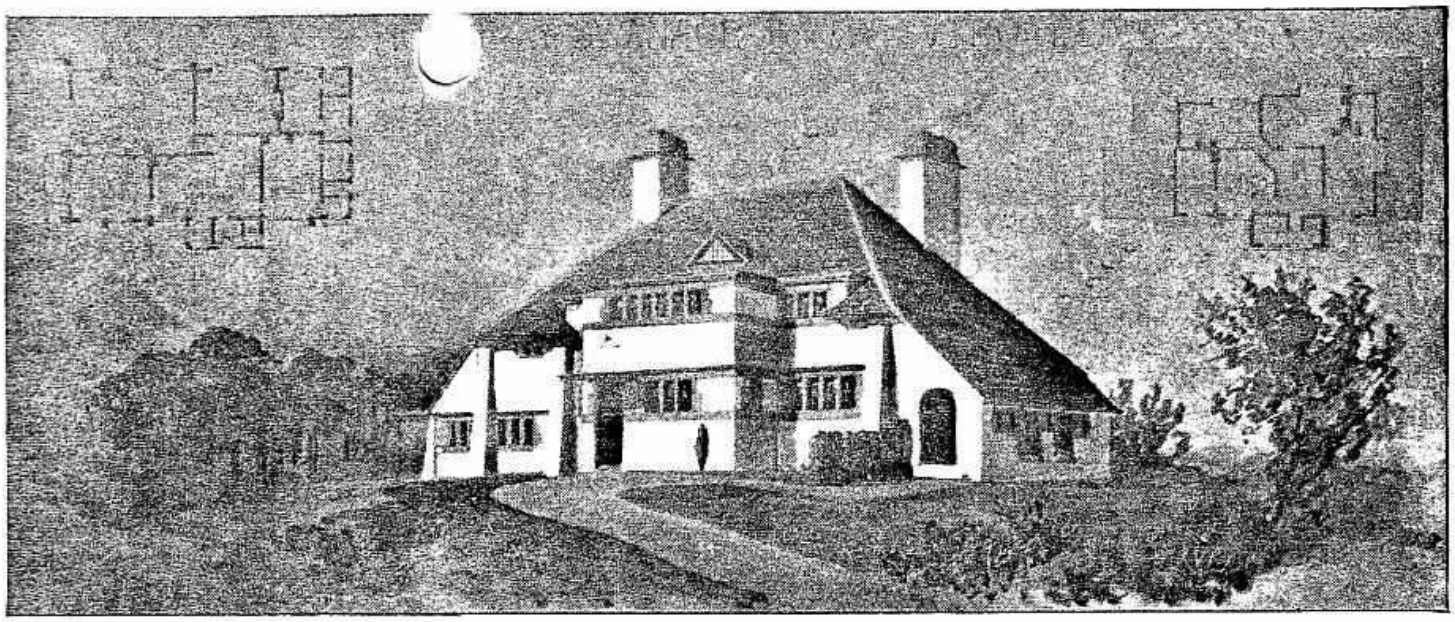
Unless one approaches Mr. Voysey's designs for houses with some appreciation of his intention, there is danger in confusing his essential principles with those which chance to be also æsthetic. No one who sketches from Nature will deny that a Voysey cottage is a far more seemly building for the foreground of a fine landscape than is the average suburban villa with "high art," as commerce understands it, proclaimed boldly in every detail. Given a few creeping plants, and some time-stains—that last painting which nature slowly but gratuitously adds to every picture, and the houses he has built fall into the scheme of an English landscape as harmoniously as do the thatched cottages of a past century. That this quality of accord with nature is rare in modern architecture needs no examples adduced for proof. A view from any railway-carriage window will discover a thousand discordant objects of the country. Without quoting any instances in our own land, who can forget the perky little French villas which do so much to vulgarise the exquisite apple-orchards of Normandy in the spring, when after a mile of pure Corot, or Harpignies, the eye is arrested by a little toy "maisonette," which in its trim angularity strikes a discordant note at once, as if you perched the latest thing in Paris hats on one of the seated Graces of the Parthenon.



AN ARTIST'S COTTAGE AT BEDFORD PARK C. F. A. VOYSEY, ARCHITECT

Were the good qualities of Mr. Voysey's building all told in this statement, and their one claim to artistic approval rested on their relation to the landscape around, enough would be proved to warrant his claim to a very honourable place among modern architects. For of only a very few could as much be said truly—and one doubts where in any other case such economy of money or material could also be claimed for the same works.

But there is another side—and a very important one it is. If you study the plans of his small houses, you will be amazed to find how liberal is the space compared with the cost of the building. You will also discover that he believes in the importance of one or two large rooms—large, that is to say, in pro-



HOUSE AT SWANAGE — C. F. A. VOYSEY, ARCHITECT

portion to the dimensions of the whole building—instead of a lot of little rooms and narrow, unnecessary passages.

Readers of THE STUDIO will possibly remember a plan and elevation for an artist's cottage (Vol. IV. p. 34), where in a building estimated to cost between £700 and £800 there was a living-room 28 ft. by 14 ft. This of course was in place of two so-called drawing and dining-rooms, 14 ft. by 14 ft., which the average little villa would offer you; but although there was no other "reception-room," a passage at the back was widened, and by the addition of a bay window figured as a smoking-room. or picture-gallery, some 20 ft. long, by 9 ft. wide in the bay and 6 ft. at either end. In short, the house was planned for people who prefer the easy, if unconventional ménage, to the discomfort of the dull, orthodox routine. In place of a stuffy little parlour, and an equally stuffy little feeding apartment, you had one spacious room and one handy lounge, avaible when domestic economy required the other to be given up to "laying the cloth" or other household duties.

It is perhaps this tendency of real economy designed to provide for actual comfort in place of imaginary luxury which repels certain people from Mr. Voysey's work. In the last "Arts and Crafts" a roofed bedroom chair was the object of much zealous detraction. As it chanced, the present writer when writing about this particular item was undergoing the ordinary discomfort of a common cold, and sitting at his work beneath a studio sky-light: consequently he thought of the chair with personal recognition of its draught-screening powers, and wished he had been lucky enough to own it. He did not think of it as one of eight or ten—all hooded—around a dining-room table, because it was clearly intended for an invalid's use. Yet to hear certain comments upon it, one would have supposed that it was Mr. Voysey's idea of a work-a-day chair, subject to many changes of place. So the cottages he plans for ample sites, with side as well as front lighting, must not be criticised as his idea of a small house in a London street. You have but to study certain houses in Hans Place, S.W., to see that the architect is quite as able to grapple with the artificial conditions of crowded life in a neighbourhood where ground is costly, as with a cottage site where land is cheap. Nor if your habit of living necessitates formal hospitality would he give you a living-room and a lounge in place of the conventional reception-rooms of a town mansion. His simplicity of detail may be governed by pecuniary economy in one case; but as you remember the Hans Place houses, you will not find more liberal expenditure lavished upon the ornamental fittings of the builder's catalogue. In England, where domestic life gathers to itself so many purely ornamental objects—pictures, porcelain, and the rest—the rooms themselves cannot fitly receive the same richness of treatment that in a continental salon, with its sparse furniture, seems so eminently right. Here the two styles are not pitted against each other, for both are legitimate provision for the actual needs of the occupant. But recognising the fondness of an English householder for all sorts of extraneous objects of art and vertu, it is well not to make the rooms so completely self-sufficient that every added item helps to mar their original effect.

How well Mr. Voysey has realised golden silence

THE GARDEN FRONT, WALNUT TREE FARM — C. F. A. VOYSEY, ARCHITECT

and silver speech his designs will show. For if silence is the most precious, yet speech is not despicable. Indeed, many of us are bi-metallists in this sense. One form of speech is unluckily prohibited in writing of contemporaries, and that is a description of the personality of the artist. It is true that by his works ye shall know him; yet if a hint of their author's real self could be conveyed at the same time, how much fuller and quicker would they be comprehended. Good taste forbids even the hint, and a dozen anecdotes, a score of sayings uttered unguardedly in private conversation must not be repeated here. But without breaking into the privacy of his life in any way, it is only bare justice to record the fact that Mr. Voysey's simplicity of manner, his aim to use honest materials in a straightforward way, his occasional touches of humour, such as appear even in his most important works—all these are the open expression of the man as well as of the architect. Some natures are dual, and with no conscious hypocrisy a man holds quite different creeds for his professional duties and his personal habits. We have known people austere and ascetic, who were prodigals and incontinent in their art, also people who preferred rigid simplicity for their own surroundings, and yet delighted in making those of other people gorgeous, if not absolutely vulgar; others with a professed hatred of shams, who were so bewildered by some ingenious expedient to gain a splendid effect by means of imitative substitutes for the more costly material, that all their theories were forgotten. But search through Mr. Voysey's work as you may, you will find no attempt to produce any effect by imitative means. One other thing may be put on record—namely, his habit of referring directly to Nature for inspiration, and his indifference to precedent; not in any contemptuous attitude of superiority, but in a real feeling of humility which believes Nature to be the source of all, and so prefers to seek the fountain-head direct. One may misunderstand his rigid suppression of ornament so-called, his avoidance of carving and stained glass, and the pretty trifles which the builder of the modern house delights in. Yet to comprehend his attitude towards the orthodox enrichments of the house it is well to remember that when pattern is required for textiles, papers, or what not, the same artist who is unflinching in repressing it when he believes it will be superfluous, revels in the beauty of intricate line and complex colour when the occasion justifies it. We have, as I said before, many examples of Mr. Voysey's economic work, yet we may be sure that if a palace came from his hands it would be distinguished by the larger beauty which makes a Greek temple memorable rather than by the petty ornamentation that has

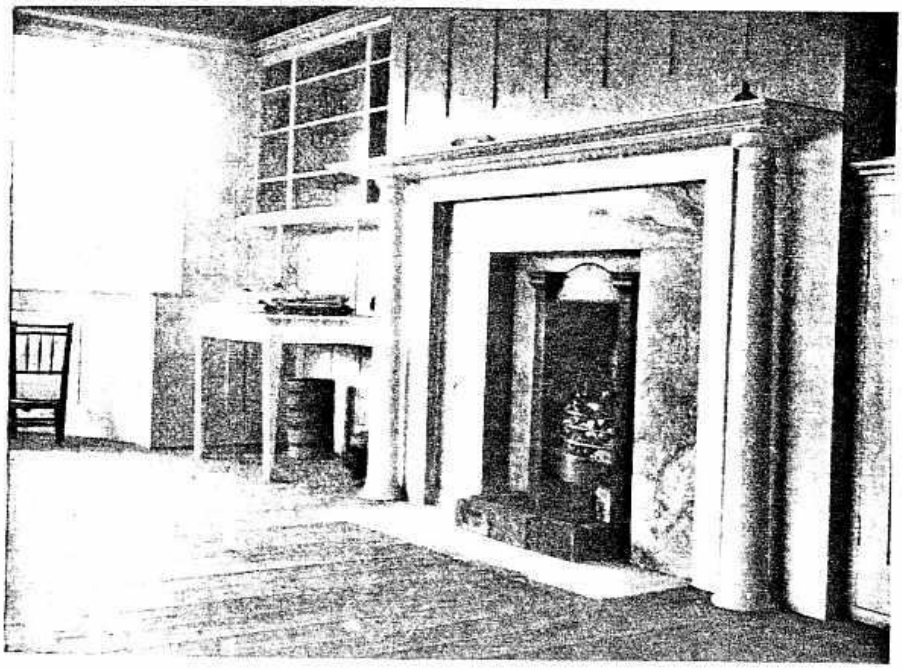
ighted many excellent people in bygone ages no less than to-day.

The record of his work is not very long, yet it is too lengthy to be described adequately here. For descriptions in detail of buildings conceived more or less in the same spirit would be wearisome and singularly unconvincing. It would serve little purpose to give a complete list of Mr. Voysey's schemes in progress, or already carried out. The selection here illustrated will serve to represent the chief features of his work.

The studio for W. E. F. Britten, Esq., St. Dunstan's Road, West Kensington (p. 24), occupies a unique position for a town house, as it is in the angle of an L-shaped street, and isolated from its neighbours. With its severe outline and pleasantly painted woodwork it arrests your attention and proclaims its author at a glance. Indeed, when you come across it by accident in the very ordinary street, it is almost startling to realise how wide a gulf separates its design from the average town studio. But the site permitted the building, and the architect took full advantage of the unusual conditions.

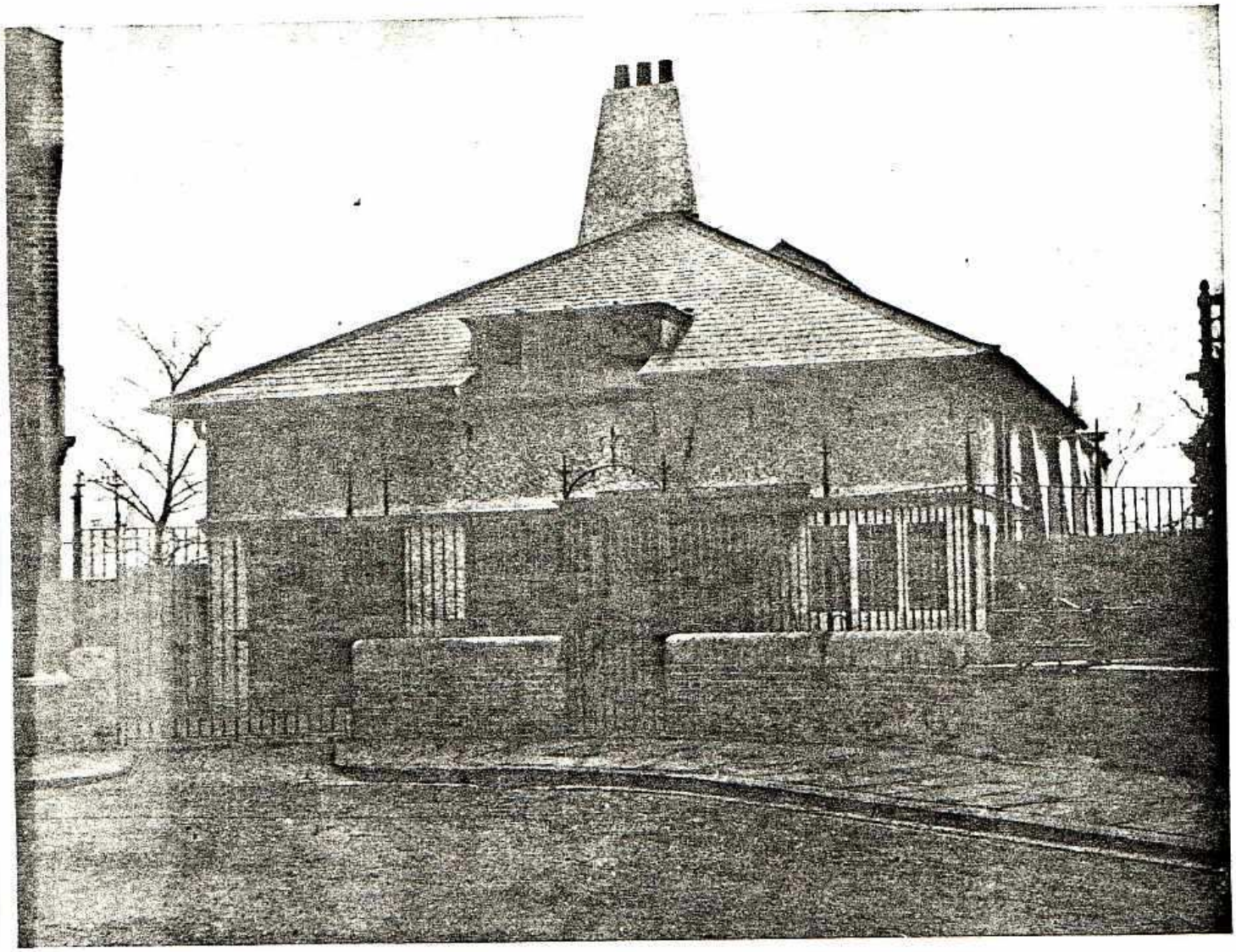
The two houses *14 and 16 Hans Road, Chelsea*, do not amaze you by sheer novelty as Mr. Britten's studio surprises. Yet as you study their simple but dignified façade, once again you recognise Mr. Voysey's handling as surely as if his name were written legibly across it. Even in the small scale on which they are shown here, the exquisite sense of proportion, and the reticent use of even purely architectural features, impress you with a sense of sufficiency. They look what they are, solid, comfortable dwellings, that preserve a distinction all their own, even in a neighbourhood where satisfactory houses are not uncommon. It is rare to find personality revealed by simplicity; as a rule it is the flourishes or the eccentricity of the letters which betray handwriting. Here Mr. Voysey has no superfluous stroke, no affected detail, and yet his individuality stands clearly revealed.

HOUSES IN HANS ROAD, CHELSEA
C. F. A. VOYSEY, ARCHITECT



FIREPLACE IN HOUSE AT FRENSHAM C. F. A. VOYSEY, ARCHITECT

It is possible that *Walnut-Tree Farm, Castle Morton, Worcestershire*, as it appears in one illustration here, would not at once betray its author: but in the second from another point of view there would be little reason for doubt. But the garden front is entirely typical. The four gables breaking the long tiled roof, the buttress to the lower storey, the simple yet novel treatment of the porch, and



HOUSE AND STUDIO IN ST. DUNSTAN'S ROAD, WEST KENSINGTON — C. F. A. VOYSEY, ARCHITECT

the placing of the chimney-stacks are entirely characteristic of their author. It is a home worthy its pastoral name; a building which seems in every way suggestive of the clean, luxurious domesticity of an English homestead; so that as you study it in various photographs and plans you are conscious of a yearning for all the leisurely comforts a visit to such a house implies.

The *Six Cottages, Elmesthorpe*, for the Earl of Lovelace, are particularly picturesque, and they are moreover, extremely commodious and compact. The porches coupled in pairs, with the great eaves of thatch brought over them, help to give a sense of shelter that suggests a hen covering her chickens. The bench outside each porch is the only addition to the bare necessities of a house, and yet this simple and inexpensive item betrays sympathy with the inmates — a reward of rest after honest labour. In touches of this sort Mr. Voysey betrays plainly the accord with humanity which softens the apparent austerity of his work. His "extras" do not take the form of ornament, not even of a decorated inscription setting forth the glory of the architect; but when they are apparent, they are invariably planned to yield some little pleasure to the occupants.

In a *House at Frensham* (p. 16) for E. J. Horniman, Esq., we have a very typical "Voysey" building. The proportions of the roof, the angle buttresses, the window which breaks into the eaves, the casements, each slightly unlike the other, and especially the curious dormer which appears below the chimney-stack, are distinctly characteristic of Mr. Voysey's manner, comely and pleasant. The interior views show the same rigid distrust of ornament. Yet the homely looking, wide fireplace, no less than the more conventional mantelpiece in another room, reveal beauty gained by harmony in the balance of structural parts. In the pillars to the latter mantelpiece Mr. Voysey abjures bases for his columns, as he did in another design at the last Arts and Crafts. Whether this innovation is quite justified need not be discussed here, but from long associations there can be little doubt that the absence of a plinth

seems a defect. Yet in Egyptian and in Doric architecture this is not felt; but so far as memory serves, the columns in both styles never started from the actual ground level, but from a low wall which is but a plinth of another sort. If only space permitted, it would be interesting to illustrate each façade of this house, which is built in brickwork, cement rough-cast, and limewashed, roofed with Westmoreland green slates, with lead pipes and ridges. The ideal of a modest country-house is surely realised here. It is not "a cottage with a double coach-house, a cottage of gentility," Coleridge's delightfully apt instance of the devil's darling sin, "the pride that apes humility," but a real cottage that has no pretension and is yet comely enough and commodious enough to be the shooting-box of an emperor.

Perry-Croft, a house at Colwall, Malvern, is a larger building with the L-shaped plan that its author evidently finds peculiarly adapted for domestic requirements. In one arm of the L are the kitchen, scullery, and offices, while the other is devoted to the reception-rooms and bedrooms. As you notice its projecting eaves, its wide windows close beneath, and its massively simple chimney-stacks, it reveals Mr. Voysey's hand, and from the garden, as the two sides are seen, the buttresses which he has made are so peculiarly his own as to dismiss any shadow of suspicion concerning its author.

Perhaps the best known of all this architect's work is *An Artist's Cottage* at Bedford Park, a white house in the very centre of the red-brick revival, a "cottage" of three storeys, that contains a studio 31 ft. by 17 ft., and a parlour 17 ft. 6 in. by 14 ft., with three bedrooms and the usual offices. The contract price for this was £494 10*s*., a price that takes one's breath away, and tempts one to believe that if the site were obtained it would be economic as well as delightful to quit one's present tenancy, and employ Mr. Voysey to design another for one's own needs. It is amusing to read that it was found necessary, in order to prevent the builder from displaying the usual "ovolo mouldings," "stop chamfers," fillets, and the like, to prepare eighteen sheets of contract drawings to show where his beloved ornamentation *was to be omitted*. This topsy-turvy proceeding is delightfully suggestive of the entirely mechanical adornment in general use which is so thoroughly a part of the routine that great pains have to be taken to prevent the workmen from unconscious "decoration," according to their wonted habit.

There is no doubt that red brick, beautiful as it is in the hands of competent designers, can be vulgarised more easily than simple rough-cast limewashed. But the value of Mr. Voysey's art is not in the use of any material, or on any mannerism, but in his evident effort to seek first the utilitarian qualities of strength and fitness, and to obtain beauty by common honesty. This separates it at once from the spurious honesty which ultra-Gothic designers made ridiculous; or from an affectation of clumsy simplicity which defeats its purpose. In these houses illustrated you can discover that it is neither Gothic nor Classic architecture which Mr. Voysey practises, but house-building pure and simple. The habit of making pretty pictures, to be carried out in all available materials, regardless of cost and, often enough, of good taste also, has not attracted him, as it failed to attract the other men of his profession who have regained a lost position for English domestic architecture.

In others not illustrated here, including a design for a more ambitious work than any of these, a house for the Earl of Lovelace at Ockham Park, and those drawings which were shown at last year's Academy, the moral to be drawn is—like most truths—somewhat monotonous. But enough has been said to prove that Mr. Voysey is not a mere dreamer, but a practical and experienced architect, who will give you first a sanitary, substantial, and comfortable house, and in doing so—with no extra cost, but often with a most unusual economy—manage to make it a really artistic building at the same time. So rare a combination of fact and fancy deserves reiteration. Hitherto we had imagined that beautiful things—whether Morris cretonnes or Kelmscott Press books—or a hundred less familiar examples, were only to be enjoyed by people of very ample incomes. Mr. Voysey does not quote as his motto, "Economy at any price," but all the same he gives it you, without sacrificing comeliness and stateliness in so doing. For there is a stateliness of a sort in absence of decoration—as a well-known anecdote of an American foreign minister goes to prove. It is not the only way—in certain circumstances it may not even be the best way—but it is a very good plan to take it as a working rule, that all mere ornament is to be viewed with suspicion, and that if even Owen Jones' advice "decorate your construction, do not construct your decoration" holds a still greater truth—that given the right artist, the construction may be in itself sufficiently beautiful to require no added adornment. Seek first construction, and whether the rest be added unto it or not, the result will be not often unsatisfactory. "G."