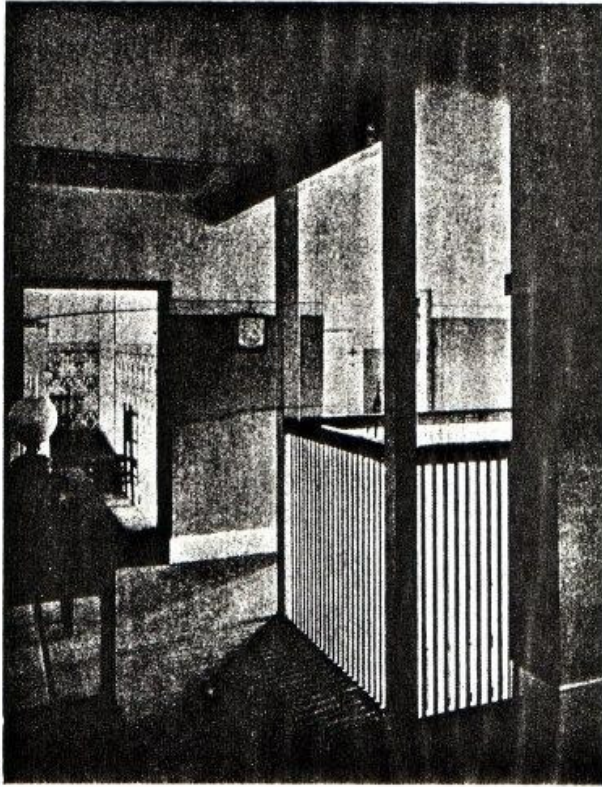
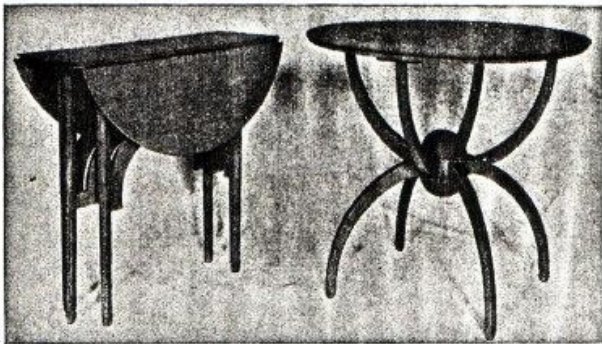




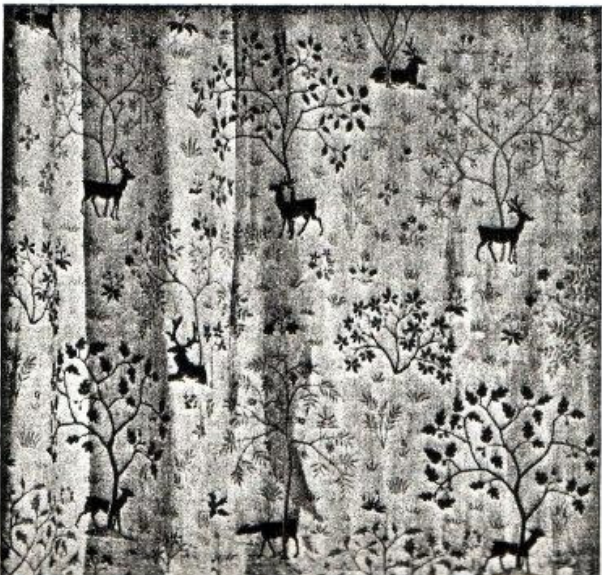
1



2



3



1, the exterior of "The Orchard," Chorley Wood, the house Voysey built for himself in 1900. 2, the first floor landing of the same house. 3, a folding table in oak without stain or polish, designed for Garden Corner, Chelsea, in 1906. 4, "Stags and Trees," a typical Voysey textile designed for

SO the dear old gentleman with the shrewd and kindly face walks no longer every morning up St. James's Street. No longer will that little figure, somewhat lonely and somewhat pathetic, be seen in his large armchair in the Arts Club. No longer will his gentle voice, growing irritable only when talked to admiringly about his work, be heard; no longer the genuine humility and gracious courtesy of his manner be heard and seen. How patient he was with the eagerly searching visitor, how obliging—only a little fidgety when asked to part for a time with photographs or drawings of his buildings or designs. He hated negligence. A record of the transaction was at once taken and signed by the borrower, and soon the blue cards began to arrive with alarmed questions about the safety of his property.

Such is the fond recollection which most of us who have known Charles Annesley Voysey will keep and cherish. But there are still some alive who remember him in his youth. At school, I was told by someone who knew him then, he appeared, in spite of his slight and delicate build, resolute and pertinacious. When once at fives he hurt himself badly—I think he even fractured his hand—he did not stop but played on, pale and determined. And when later one day architecture and art and his attitude to the past were discussed, he exclaimed: "Why should I do over again what has been done before?" This aspect of Voysey's character is little known—too little, because on the phase of his activity to which this saying can serve as a motto his historical importance chiefly rests.

The Voysey of about 1890 was the leading European representative of the stage in architecture and design following that of Morris. But Voysey was never a follower of Morris; or at least not one of his admirers, for no architect-designer could be uninfluenced to some extent by Morris's new conception of design and its social implications. But Voysey, the son of Charles Voysey, the upright preacher of the 'sixties and 'seventies, disliked what he called Morris's atheism, and he criticized Morris's lack of spatial feeling. Only in the flat, he once said to me, could Morris work at ease. Voysey's real predecessors were Mackmurdo—I have tried to show that more than once—and also Norman Shaw at his most adventurous.\*

Voysey soon proved as bold as they, and occasionally bolder, in the introduction of original architectural motifs and the stylizing power of patterns.

Yet he never was harsh, never dogmatic, never really convinced that all bonds with tradition were to be severed to arrive at a new style for the century to come. In fact, he never consciously wanted to create a new style. In his old age he vigorously protested against his being called a pioneer of contemporary architecture.† And already much earlier, when he had reached the age of 35, he gave up novel motifs and concentrated upon a thoughtful and imaginative interpretation of the style of the English seventeenth-century cottage. Yet he never

\* See THE ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW.



copied. The idiom he developed was all his own, extremely personal, easily recognizable, and pleasing to all, experts as well as laymen.

His success in the 'nineties was something exceptional. A list of the houses he built in those ten years would fill pages, and it does fill pages in the little black book into which, in his clear, round and neat handwriting, he entered every commission. There were houses amongst them famous with the progressive architects all over Europe, "Broadleys" on Lake Windermere, for example, and "The Orchard," Chorley Wood. They and many others were illustrated in *The Studio* and *The British Architect*, and soon also in *Dekorative Kunst* and *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration*. Muthesius's *Das Englische Haus* of 1904 contained the ultimate recognition of his European importance. Its influence on Mackintosh and Walton in the north is evident, that on Baillie Scott and Ashbee in the south hardly disputable; with Muthesius's help it created the so-called cottage-style in Germany and Holland; van de Velde in Brussels said it appeared like Spring re-born to the young artists of Belgium, and Dudok in Amsterdam only a few years ago called Voysey, to a London reporter, England's greatest living architect. But not only architects admired him, his clients also liked him and got on excellently with him. He was painstakingly careful, exact in his estimates, full of understanding for the specific qualities of a site, never sacrificing ground-plan requirements to effects of the façade—to study his ground-plans is a special treat—and apparently in sincere sympathy with his clients' wishes.

For he never regarded himself as the great artist whose genius must be respected and accepted without querying. He built what was to be useful and enjoyable—that was all. Hence the undated perfection of the best of his mature work.

In the same spirit did he design. Useful: that made him find strong words to an interviewer for *The Studio* in 1893 against the unnecessary adorning of the things we are surrounding ourselves with (as early as 1890 he published in *The British Architect* a small house under the title "Cockney Villa minus ostentatious gimcrackery") and made him keep his interiors so simple, clean and light. But enjoyable too: that made him keep away from stern functionalism. He introduced grace and friendliness into his furniture and metal-work, and he allowed his fancy free play in textile and wallpaper designs—designs so fresh and lovable, so perfectly balanced between stylization and love of nature that the best of them have, to my mind, never been surpassed since.

And yet it is only in the last few years that, after twenty years of almost complete silence, this historically altered recognition of Voysey's genius has begun to spread. A few recent appreciations have appeared in magazines,\* and last year the R.I.B.A. presented their Royal Gold Medal to him. However, gratifying as it is to see his bonds with the present done justice to, it must not be forgotten that the essence of his work and his personality does not belong to our age but to an age gone for ever. For

Voysey believed in a humane, homely, honest life, in simplicity with domestic care and comfort, and in leisure judiciously and pleasurably spent amidst trees and flowers. The photograph of "The Orchard" (his own house) reproduced here he did not like; the one he gave me for use in another connection showed just one gable, the windows below and part of the roof, but the old cherry tree and the younger trees in the orchard most conspicuously. Flats he hated, and he built only one factory (Sanderson's

at Turnham Green), hardly any offices and shops, and not one public building. He was averse to collectivism, to mass-movements, to show and publicity, a conscientious, unostentatious individualist.

One of the last times I saw him, he said: "This new style cannot last. Our young architects have no religion. They have nothing to aspire to. They are like designers who draw flowers and trees without thinking with reverence of Him who created them."

\* J. Betjeman, *ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW*, vol. 70, 1931; N. Pevsner, *Elsevier's Handbuch*, vol. 50, 1940.