

C. F. A. Voysey Archt.

Charles Francis Annesley Voysey, 1857-1941, was, perhaps, the best known British architect at the beginning of the twentieth century. He was also renowned as a designer of fabrics, wallpapers and carpets. The Voysey House, with its characteristic decoration and furniture was known throughout Europe and America. It represented, in an architectural form, the new intellectual and artistic enlightenment.

H.G. Wells lived in a Voysey house - Spade House, at Sandgate, near Folkestone, Kent, built in 1899. *The Studio*, a new kind of popular art magazine, with an international outlook as well as an international circulation, helped to make Voysey famous.

While the Voysey style - architectural as well as decorative - is instantly recognizable, it is important to acknowledge that Voysey was part of a movement - the Arts and Crafts. Its influence upon domestic architecture, may be gauged by citing some of the principal names. From the generation that preceded Voysey's - the proto-Arts and Crafts generation - there were George Devey, in whose office Voysey was to work, W. Eden Nesfield and Richard Norman Shaw. Philip Webb, from the same generation, is properly claimed as a true Arts and Crafts architect. From Voysey's own generation one must include: C.R. Ashbee, Cecil Brewer, Ernest Gimson, W.R. Lethaby, Edwin Lutyens, Charles Rennie Mackintosh, Ernest Newton, Barry Parker, E.S. Prior, M.H. Baillie Scott, George Walton and Edgar Wood. So powerful was the impact of the Arts and Crafts movement upon domestic architecture that another thirty, or even forty, important names could be added to the list.

Voysey's fame, unlike that of many of his contemporaries, never entirely faded away -

even during the lean years of the Modern Movement. In 1931, John Betjeman wrote about him with enthusiasm in *The Architectural Review*. In 1934, the architect Raymond McGrath, a champion of the new movement, praised him highly in the historical part of his *Twentieth Century Houses* which, apart from Frederick Etchell's 1927 translation of Le Corbusier's *Vers une Architecture*, of 1923, was the first modernist text accessible to the layperson in Britain. Nikolaus Pevsner in *Pioneers of the Modern Movement* (later to appear as *Pioneers of Modern Design*), which was first published in 1936, recognized Voysey and his achievements - albeit as a precursor of the Modern Movement.

What are the affinities between designing decoration, or pattern, or ornament - call it what one chooses - and designing buildings? The fact is, if one looks outside our present century, or even at the early years of this century, it is easy enough to find architects who were among the best decorative designers of their era. Think of Palladio, Inigo Jones, Nash, Soane Or, in the nineteenth century, Pugin, William Butterfield, William Burges, E.W. Godwin, Louis Sullivan, Hector Guimard, the young Henry Van de Velde. . . . Yet the skills now considered necessary for designing pattern, or architecture, are assumed to be widely different. Even the most superficial analysis, however, will establish that there is a good deal in common between the processes of organizing a pattern and organizing a building. Architects and decorative designers both need a thorough knowledge of practical geometry, as well as the rules of bilateral and multi-lateral symmetry, and need to know how to organize discrete elements within given spaces. Much architectural

design, like pattern design, has always been concerned with two-dimensional organization. Composing a façade, or applying the rules of proportion, have always been taught as if they were two-dimensional activities. Architects and designers both need to understand how the permutation of the components of a design can produce variety. Permutation is an essential part of the designing process.

The question of historic style is far less relevant in the case of Voysey's decoration than it is in the cases of other late nineteenth and early twentieth century designers - particularly run-of-the-mill commercial designers. Designers were then expected to have a complete command of the approved historical and national styles. A sophisticated, though sometimes arid, eclecticism was the outcome. Voysey, however, like other Arts and Crafts designers - Morris, or Webb, or Lethaby - sought to rise above mere style and produce work which, though related to tradition, was autonomous.

The recurring subjects in Voysey's decoration are those of his era. They consist, for the most part, of familiar plants, trees, birds and occasionally animals - very like William Morris's decorative subjects. They function as symbols of a beneficent and abundant nature. Nature was viewed as a reassuring constant during a time of considerable social, political and psychological flux. Voysey's decoration - and decoration has all too often been treated as a minor art form incapable of purveying meaning - is in reality full of meaning. But the language he speaks is of his own age. Voysey is best understood if he is set against the backdrop of his own times.

The Reverend Charles Voysey, 1828-1912

Voysey's father was caught up in the turmoil of his age. Voysey's own responses were often conditioned by the experiences of his father. Voysey was always very close to his father who was a determined and original man. Charles Voysey was the son of an architect - Annesley Voysey, 1794-1834. He was descended from John Wesley's sister - the family tradition of dissent may well

help to explain his subsequent doctrinal quarrel with the church. In 1851, Charles Voysey graduated from St Edmund's Hall, Oxford, and was ordained in the Church of England. In 1852 he married Frances Maria Edlin, the daughter of a banker. There were to be four sons and six daughters. After seven years as curate in Hessle, a suburb of Kingston-upon-Hull - where Voysey was born - he was appointed incumbent to a parish in Jamaica. Annesley Voysey had, in fact, practised in Jamaica and one may assume some long-standing connections. However, he returned to England after a comparatively short time and was appointed to a curacy at Great Yarmouth. We find him in 1864, several curacies later, mainly in poor parishes, appointed vicar of Healaugh, which is some six miles from the cathedral city of York.

In 1861, while curate at St Mark's, Whitechapel, Charles Voysey preached against the doctrine of eternal punishment. But in 1864, soon after his arrival at Healaugh, he published a sermon - 'Is every statement in the Bible about our Heavenly Father true?' As a result of such unorthodox preaching, which amounted almost to heresy in the minds of the church authorities, he was ultimately summoned, in 1869, to present himself before the Chancellor's Court of the Diocese of York. He was deprived of his living. Voysey subsequently put his case against this decision to the Privy Council, which again passed judgement against him on February 11, 1871. He was given a week in which to retract his errors. He would not. Furthermore, costs were awarded against him.

Even before the judgement came into effect, Charles Voysey had begun to hold services in St George's Hall, Langham Place. He quickly attracted followers and a 'Voysey Establishment Fund' was organized.

Voysey was a courageous man. He could have lived out his life as a country clergyman, with a secure living - certainly with enough money to bring up his family in a congenial middle-class manner. He could also have hoped to advance within the hierarchy of the church. For there is no doubt that his talents had at one time been recognized by his superiors. Charles Voysey

chose instead a difficult and potentially isolated path. He suffered for his beliefs. His family, including young Voysey, must have suffered with him.

The Voysey affair was one of the church scandals of the day, although certainly not the equal in its impact of the Gorham Judgement, or of Charles Kingsley's unpleasant libel of John Henry Newman. The story of the Voysey affair would be worth recounting even if it merely shed light upon the childhood circumstances of Voysey. The nature of Charles Voysey's teaching was, however, in itself remarkable. Because, in addition, it influenced Voysey's subsequent attitudes, it is worthy of more than cursory examination.

The startling fact is that Charles Voysey, far from developing an unorthodox variety of Anglican theology, founded what amounted to a new religion. By 1885 he had collected a not inconsiderable following and had acquired his own church - to be known as The Theistic Church, Swallow Street, which is a small street linking Piccadilly with Regent Street. A far from unfashionable venue, one might think. Charles Voysey published his ideas vociferously. His collected sermons - in ten volumes - were readily available and his defence of his position at York was in print thirty years after the event. Charles Voysey's teaching, however, is most accessible in *Theism: or the Religion of Common Sense*, 1894, which had first appeared as a series of weekly articles in *The Weekly Times and Echo*.

Theism was 'not only a theology, but a religion'. Theists, unlike many churchmen, positively welcomed the discoveries of science. The theory of evolution, even its doctrine of the survival of the fittest, could be embraced. Theism itself, Charles Voysey claimed, was the product of the evolutionary advance of modern religious thought. Traditional revelation was suspect and to be discarded.

The God of the Theists was all goodness. The pains and sorrows of this world were simply the means by which God 'has raised and is raising us from a merely animal or savage state'. While Charles Voysey accepted that there was an after-life, he discouraged speculation upon its nature. Above

all, his God was neither angry, nor vengeful. Mediators, priests and Christ himself, were unnecessary between man and God. 'An incarnation like that of Jesus Christ . . . would create a gulf between God and men which never existed . . . if God be our Father in deed and truth, mediation and intercession would only distress and insult Him'. He cited the view that the 'deification of Jesus is the grand historical testimony to the meanness of man's thoughts about God'.

Charles Voysey's Theism accorded with the mood of 'sweetness and light' which is associated with the thinking of the cultivated middle classes of the 1870s and 1880s. Theism may be seen as emanating as much from the undermining of conventional faith - by the reverberating findings of science - as from biblical criticism. Its essential optimism contrasts strikingly with the pessimism which scientific discovery induced in Ruskin, who pondered upon a statement by Dunning that man, because he possessed carnivorous teeth, was a predator by nature, Ruskin wrote in his diary, on March 29, 1874: 'To such a man, and to the nation believing him, all history is dead - all Art and all Nature . . . To have the soul of a thief so fastened to one's body . . .'. Charles Voysey retained his equilibrium in the face of Darwinism. Theism was not opposed to 'a single fact' of science.

Let him make a final claim for Theism: 'Theism, like all other forms of belief is anthropomorphic, and must in the nature of things be so. That is why it is not final, but must one day grow into something higher and better. But this is why it is better than the Christian faith . . . its conception of God is unspeakably higher and more true than those distinctive conceptions of God which are essentially "Christian".' With the death of Charles Voysey on July 20, 1912, Dr Walter Walsh led the Theist congregation. But soon there was schism. The Swallow Street church was closed in 1913 and the building soon demolished.

Voysey was twelve when the drama at Healaugh began to unfold. It must have permanently scarred him. It also tempered and hardened him.

Voysey's early education

Voysey was first tutored by his father - a common enough practice in clerical families. Charles Voysey was, in fact, an experienced teacher and had run a school at Hesse with his brother. However, after the loss of the living at Healaugh, when the Voysey family moved to London, Voysey was sent as a day-boy to Dulwich College which was, by all accounts, an enlightened institution.

There had been a good deal of ambitious building at the school shortly before Voysey's arrival there. Charles Barry, junior, 1823-1900, the son of Sir Charles Barry, was the architect. Work had begun in 1866 and had been completed when Voysey joined Dulwich in 1872. The style was North Italian Renaissance and rich in terracotta detail. Barry's Dulwich College is not without affinities with Captain Fowkes' contributions to the South Kensington Museum - now the Victoria and Albert Museum - which was conceived at much the same time. Whatever young Voysey thought of Barry's work, there is no denying that he was exposed - at an impressionable age - to an exciting, if rather 'intemperate' building, as one critic observed.

J.C.L. Sparkes was Art Master at Dulwich. He appears to have been an inspiring teacher. Stanhope Forbes, 1857-1947, the founder of the Newlyn School of *plein air* painting - painter of 'The Health of the Bride', 1889, a delightful genre picture, as popular now as the day it was first exhibited, was a fellow pupil of Sparkes. Another was Henry La Thangue, 1859-1929 - best known for his picture 'The Man with the Scythe', 1895, in which an old countryman with a scythe passes the gate of a cottage garden, where a child, seemingly dying of consumption, sits propped in a chair. The intimation of approaching death is clear. La Thangue was said to have combined successfully 'French techniques and British sentiment'. The diminished reputations of Stanhope Forbes and La Thangue are now reviving. In their own day, however, they were among the most esteemed of post Pre-Raphaelite young painters.

Sparkes, so able to recognize potential in the young, evidently did not suggest a career

in art for Voysey. His figure drawing - though he could only have drawn from plaster casts at Dulwich - though passable, would not have impressed even the percipient Sparkes. Voysey was never destined to be a painter. Might Sparkes have suggested architecture to Voysey's family as a future career for their son?

Sparkes, in ensuring that art was taken seriously at Dulwich, must be accounted as an early representative of the nineteenth century enlightenment. For, despite the influence of Ruskin, art was not generally a highly-rated activity in boys' schools.

Even with what one must assume to have been the benign presence of Sparkes, Voysey was withdrawn from Dulwich and placed with a private tutor. He was evidently not suited to competitive academic life. According to Martin S. Briggs, in 'Voysey and Blomfield, a study in contrasts' (*The Builder*, volume 176, January 14, 1949), Voysey did not learn to read until he was fourteen. Certainly, his spelling was sometimes curious. Possibly he was dyslexic - although retrospective diagnosis of a condition, especially one which not all psychologists actually recognize, is dangerous. It is also possible that Voysey's apparent academic under-achievement stemmed from the unsettling effects of the Healaugh case.

At all events, architecture was selected as an appropriate career. There were no qualifying examinations in the 1870s. The study of architecture was not considered likely to bring about academic stress. Voysey himself said, according to John Brandon-Jones, that the fact architecture was chosen for him, was simply because his grandfather, Annesley Voysey had been an architect.

Architectural Education in the 1870s

In the 1870s there was no formal system of architectural education in Britain. Aspiring architects were apprenticed, or articulated. There was no equivalent of the Parisian Ecole des Beaux Arts, with its complicated and graduated exercises in composition and styles. Nor was there a British institution - like the Beaux Arts - that planned to formulate a rational architecture expressing the

mores of the nineteenth century.

Articles, or apprenticeships, cost money. Fairly considerable sums, for the time, had to be paid. No doubt there were abuses. Pugin poked fun at the situation in *Contrasts*, 1836. Here he illustrated an architectural emporium in the style of Soane - a 'Temple of Taste and Architectural Repository' - the very epitome of banality. Over a door to the shop is a placard inscribed 'An architect has a vacancy in his office for one pupil - talent of no consequence. Premium £100'.

There was a distinction between those architects who were skilled technicians and those who thought of themselves as members of a burgeoning learned profession. Many architects dealt with the gentry, knew the ways of the gentry, but could not consider themselves gentry. They had an uncertain status like surgeons or apothecaries - socially equivocal professions which fascinated writers like Mrs. Gaskell or Wilkie Collins.

It is instructive to consider the social origins of Voysey's two principal mentors. John Pollard Seddon's father was a successful London cabinet maker; George Devey's was a London solicitor. To turn to the origins of some of the often leading architects of Voysey's youth: William Butterfield's father was a chemist with a shop off the Strand; Owen Jones's father was a prosperous farrier with a scholarly interest in ancient Welsh literature; William Burges' father was a successful marine engineer; and Philip Webb's father was an Oxford surgeon. George Gilbert Scott, like Voysey, came from a clerical background. While Owen Jones was articled to Lewis Vuilliamy and Burges to Edmund Blore - both fashionable and successful - the others were taught by modest enough practitioners.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, part of the necessary education of the ambitious young architect was the undertaking of a lengthy sketching tour of Europe. Voysey, always insular in his outlook, never embarked upon such a tour. Richard Norman Shaw and W. Eden Nesfield actually made early reputations by publishing facsimiles of their continental drawings.

One can merely speculate on what archi-

tectural literature Voysey would have read. He evidently read some Ruskin as he mentions him in some of his writings. Did he only read the obligatory *Seven Lamps of Architecture*, 1849? Or *The Stones of Venice*, 1852-3 - with its transcendental and unforgettable chapter 'On the Nature of Gothic'? Voysey spoke of Pugin with respect too. Did he read the stirring polemic of *Contrasts* and laugh at Pugin's amusing caricatures of tedious classicism and mindless eclecticism? There is ample visual evidence that he was acquainted with Pugin's *Glossary of Ecclesiastical Ornament*, first published in 1844, and still a standard work in the 1870s. There is always a little of Pugin's directness and vigour in Voysey's decoration. It is almost inconceivable that there would have not been a copy in Seddon's office. No self-respecting Gothic Revival ecclesiastical architect, whatever he thought of Pugin's buildings, or his beliefs, could be without the *Glossary* - a luscious, even gaudy, compendium which demonstrated the potentialities of symbolic decoration. Voysey would have also probably known Pugin's *Floriated Ornament*, 1849, reprinted in 1875, which showed how botanical illustrations could be transformed into decoration.

John Pollard Seddon, 1827-1906

J.P. Seddon was forty-six when Voysey joined his practice as an articled pupil on May 11, 1874. Voysey was within days of seventeen. He liked Voysey, and Voysey liked him. It could be said that Seddon, with his largely orthodox Anglican ecclesiastical clientele, manifested a commendable degree of liberality in taking on the eldest son of a clergyman who had been dismissed from the church for obstinate disobedience. But much of Seddon's work, particularly when he was a partner with John Pritchard, was in Wales - where dissent, if not outright heresy, was not uncommon. He would certainly have been familiar with, and hence less worried by, unorthodox theological stances than many ecclesiastical architects. Voysey would have been set to work tracing, copying, measuring, observing - 'learning by doing'. In 1874 Seddon was designing country churches in Herefordshire and

Hertfordshire and rebuilding a church in Herefordshire and altering another in Norfolk. He exhibited designs for an orphanage and the interior of a chapel at the Royal Academy in the same year.

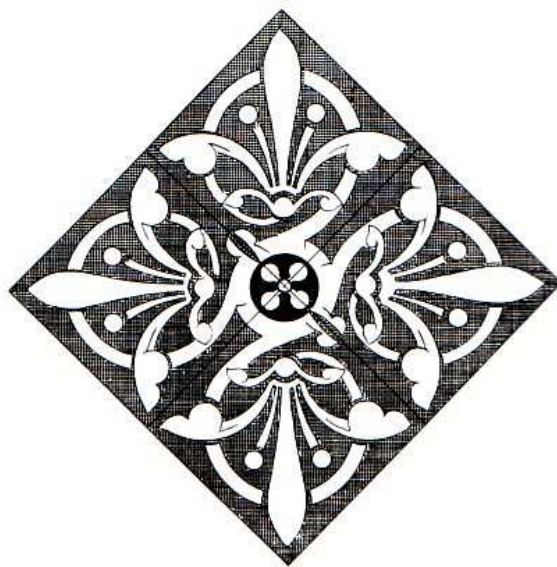
Seddon's work was always sober, decent. His buildings are excellent exemplars of sensible mediaevalism applied to nineteenth century circumstances. He is never perverse, like Butterfield, or playful, like Burges. Undoubtedly, his best known building is University College, Aberystwyth, Dyfed - now the University College of Wales. It had been begun initially as The Castle House Hotel in 1864. It is a solemn, not unlikeable, building, with rather simple and original mullions - no doubt designed for reasons of economy. Voysey is said to have designed some decorative panels in cement for the entrance to the South Wing. The building suggests that Seddon would have been well-able to handle other large commissions, had they come his way. His competition designs of 1884 for the Law Courts were not successful, however - the competition was won by George Edmund Street.

Seddon designed many pieces of furniture. As the son of a cabinet-maker, the interest is hardly surprising. He exhibited an elaborate inlaid roll-top desk on the stand of the newly-founded firm of Morris, Faulkner, Marshall and Company at the International Exhibition at South Kensington in 1862. Seddon also designed a cabinet, made by the Morris firm, named 'King René's Honeymoon', which incorporated painted panels by Ford Madox Brown, Burne Jones and Rossetti. Seddon, then, came briefly under the influence of Pre-Raphaelitism. His furniture designs also suggest that he knew Pugin's furniture - from his *Gothic Furniture*, 1835 - his first book, incidentally.

Voysey's furniture bears the imprint of his years with Seddon. His bold use of decorative hinges reminds one of Seddon. So, too, does his fondness for plain panels which rely upon the grain of the wood for their decorative effect. What was, very likely, Voysey's last executed design - an oak dressing table for his niece, the wife of the actor Robert Donat - has a mirror surround shaped like a thirteenth-century trefoil window. It is thoroughly Gothic, or more properly

Gothic Revival, in spirit. The dressing table was made in 1934, when Voysey was seventy-seven and when British Modernists were flexing their muscles. Yet he still drew succour from the era which had nurtured him.

Seddon was a competent decorative designer. He designed many encaustic floor tiles for the leading manufacturers of the day. Seddon also designed ecclesiastical embroideries. It is thus certain, quite certain, that Voysey learned the fundamentals of decoration - and Gothic decoration at that - while in the Seddon office. A drawing by Voysey of Seddon's designs for stoneware capitals and bases, for the Fulham Pottery, is to be seen in the Print Room of the Victoria and Albert Museum. The style is Ruskinian and resembles some of the details illustrated in *The Stones of Venice*.



1. John Pollard Seddon.
Design for an encaustic tile panel, for Maw and Co.
Broseley, Shropshire.
The Building News, August 22, 1873.

Voysey learned a great deal from Seddon. Not least, he adopted in his architectural thinking, the high moral tone of the committed Puginian, or Ruskinian, Goth. He assisted Seddon for a short while after completing his articles in 1878, but he left the practice fairly soon. Seddon had little in hand for 1879 - a church restoration in Buckinghamshire, the rebuilding of a church in Wales and additions to a cottage. It is

possible that the prevailing economic recession was beginning to affect even a predominantly ecclesiastical practice.

Henry Saxon Snell, 1830-1904

After leaving Seddon, Voysey joined the office of Saxon Snell who specialized in the design of hospitals and charitable institutions. The contrast with the Seddon office could not have been more marked, for Snell was essentially a technician - though an able one. He had none of Seddon's artistic leanings and had for a time been an assistant to Joseph Paxton - a fact which would have branded him a member of what Ruskin disparagingly called 'the Steam Whistle Party'. Temperamentally, Voysey was not suited to the Snell office.

Snell's best known building is The Royal Patriotic Boys Orphanage, Wandsworth, 1872 - since 1881 Emmanuel School. It is a solemn, workaday, building, with some Gothic detail and patterned brickwork. The Snell practice was a successful and durable one and under the name of Saxon Snell and Barnard it was to be responsible for the St. Helier Hospital, near Morden, of 1938.

The 1870s had seen the beginning of a great increase in the building of hospitals and schools. As early as 1863, Butterfield, who by then had a considerable reputation, had designed the County Hospital at Winchester. The design of institutional buildings was to become increasingly sophisticated. Saxon Snell himself was the author of two important studies - *Charitable and Parochial Buildings*, 1881, and, with Dr. F.J. Mouat, *Hospital Construction and Management*, 1883.

But Voysey found the work in the Snell office dull. He left after a comparatively short time. Interestingly, one of Voysey's first essays in design, after he had set up on his own, was for a sanatorium in Teignmouth, Devon, which he worked on between 1882 and 1884. No doubt, the technical expertise needed for such a specialized building must have been acquired during the time spent with Snell. The sanatorium project - a patterned brick, stone mullioned, partly half-timbered, building - came to nothing.

George Devey, 1820-1886

Voysey joined the office of George Devey, the designer of country houses, in 1880. Voysey was to spend less than two years in Devey's office, at 123 Bond Street. It was a small office by our standards - there were ten employees. He was an 'improver' - an improver was a young man who, having completed articles, worked to improve his position within the profession. An improver would work for little or, quite frequently, for no payment, in the office of a successful practitioner. Devey was certainly successful. He has, until recently, been somewhat underrated by historians, although Mark Girouard in *The Victorian Country House*, 1971, treats him very respectfully. Jill Allibone's monograph on Devey will put matters right. Devey was unquestionably a major figure. But, like Philip Webb, he was inclined to avoid publicity. Voysey was fortunate indeed to have had the opportunity to observe Devey at work at close quarters.

Devey's clients were generally members of the landed gentry, or the aristocracy. There was also the occasional *nouveau riche* client. Numbered among Devey's clients, at about the time Voysey was in his office, were: Lord Lytton, the Marquis of Lorne, Lord Granville, the Rothschilds, the Duke of Westminster and Mrs. Henrietta Montefiore. Devey had built some eleven fine houses during the decade which had begun in 1870.

Devey was a member of Charles Voysey's Theistic Church. He contributed regularly to church funds, and actually bequeathed £2,000 to the Trustees of the Theistic Church, together with the same amount to Charles Voysey himself. These were large sums in the 1880s. It was surely because of Devey's connection with Theism that Voysey was able to arrange to work in the Devey office. A spell in an important office is always a good way in which to begin a career. Voysey was twenty-two and impressionable and eager.

By 1880, when Voysey joined Devey's office, the Gothic tide had receded. Gothic had become unfashionable for country houses, as well as for secular buildings in

general. The mediaevalising country house style of Pugin, Gilbert Scott, Butterfield, Teulon, James Brooks, or Burges, was decidedly *passé*. Norman Shaw, Nesfield and Devey were the country house architects of the day. Their designs subtly alluded to the past, rather than attempting to recreate it, in the scenographic manner of their predecessors. The fashionable style in the 1870s and 1880s, was picturesque and eclectic. Shaw's Cragside, Northumberland, of 1870-1884, for the armament manufacturer William Armstrong, is as determinedly picturesque as mad Ludwig's Bavarian hill-top castle. Cragside serves as a splendid, if extreme, exemplar of picturesque eclecticism.

Independently of Shaw and Nesfield, Devey appears to have arrived at an architectural style which is quite close to their versions of what was popularly called 'Queen Anne'. His Denne Hill, near Canterbury, Kent, of 1871-75, incorporates the kind of elaborately shaped red brick gables found in Kew Palace, the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, in actuality an early seventeenth century London merchant's house, which were so beloved of Shaw.

As well as being *au courant* with modish, eclectic, Queen Anne - 'the style favoured by aesthetes', according to Walter Hammond, writing in 1881 - Devey was also an innovator. In 1876 he designed a series of five variant house types for the Spencer Estate, for an abortive middle-class housing scheme in Northampton - a kind of projected East Midlands Bedford Park. Devey's

semi-detached and terrace houses are particularly interesting. They are less affected, in terms of style, than Shaw's contemporary work in Bedford Park - the prototypical garden suburb. Devey's Northampton houses seem to be authentic precursors of the turn-of-the-century Letchworth Garden City houses of Barry Parker and Raymond Unwin, or their later houses for Hampstead Garden Suburb - or for that matter, Baillie Scott's, or Geoffrey Lucas's. Like them, Devey was accomplished in adapting vernacular features for modern use. The Drawings Collection possesses many sketches of vernacular architecture by Devey.

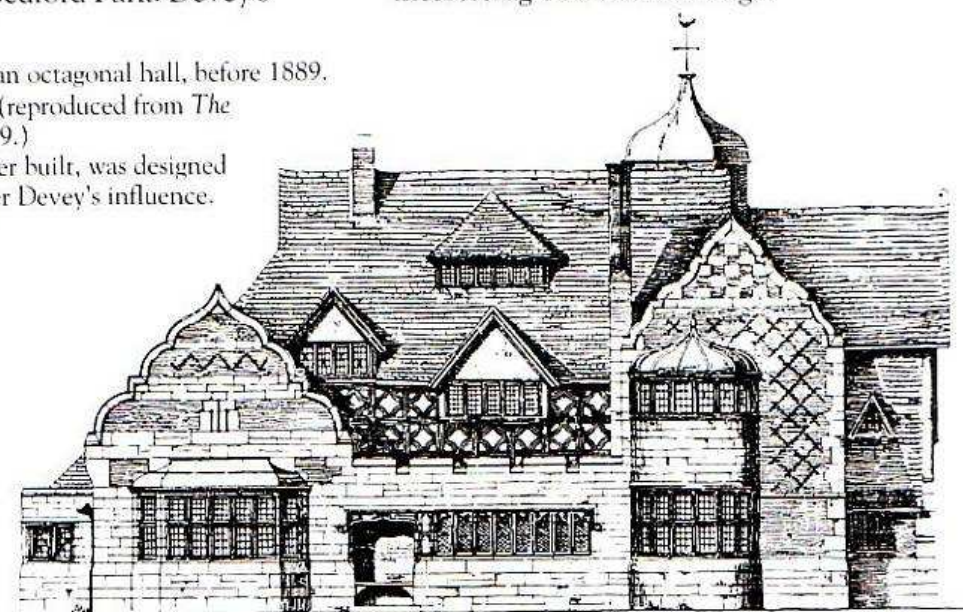
Voysey's first essays in domestic design - his design for example, for a medium-sized country house, with diapered brickwork and a stone base, illustrated in *The British Architect*, XXXI, 1889, has more than a passing resemblance to a Devey house. So, too, does his design for a half-timbered house for himself of around 1885, which was never built. (See figures 2 and 5.)

Devey evidently thought highly of Voysey. After about a year in his office, Devey had enough confidence in him to entrust him with a commission. It was a small one - a pair of cheap cottages in Northamptonshire, on land which Devey had bought. Voysey was made responsible for contracting builders, paying wages and supervising construction. Were these cottages identifiable - if they still exist - they would shed light on Voysey's development at a most interesting and critical stage.

2. Design for a house with an octagonal hall, before 1889.

Dekorative Kunst, V, 1897 (reproduced from *The British Architect*, XXXI, 1889.)

This house, which was never built, was designed when Voysey was still under Devey's influence.



Devey's patrons were quite unlike the progressive but, less well-heeled, late Victorians who were to become Voysey's own clients. Nevertheless, Voysey would have learned from Devey how an architect should deal with sophisticated and demanding people. The manner, in fact, in which Voysey conducted his practice was to remain Victorian in its character.

Voysey's own practice

In 1882, Voysey set up his own architectural practice. His first office was at Queen Anne's Gate. Soon, however, he was to move. His removal card is instructive. Voysey declares that he 'hath now removed unto ye more commodious premises situate at ye Broadway Chambers Westminster'. Here, 'from henceforth all ye craft of ye master architect will be exercised'. Such affectation may be forgiven as a youthful excess. He entered a competition for the Admiralty offices in Whitehall, but, hardly surprisingly, his design was unplaced. His design for the Teignmouth Sanatorium, as we have already seen, came to nothing. He published an etched portrait of his father. . . . Proper commissions, of course, do not always come easily to young architects at the beginnings of their careers. Voysey must, however, have had surveys and alterations to partly occupy him. Even when working for Seddon he had been undertaking these on his own account.

It was during this fallow period, that Voysey turned to decorative design. But before embarking upon an account of Voysey the decorative designer, his emergence as an architect needs to be considered. His attitudes towards decorative design are, besides, closely allied to his attitudes towards architecture. He was a whole person - there is, in truth, no disparity between his highly personal architectural style and his decoration.

Voysey, as an architect, was an entirely new kind of phenomenon. He was certainly the earliest popular architect - popular, that is, among his own contemporaries. Like his father, Voysey had considerable skill as a self-publicist. He had demonstrated it even with that curious removal card. Voysey took every opportunity to present himself to the

widest possible public. This is not to say that he was an extrovert - in the way that Pugin, or Le Corbusier, were. But Voysey, survivor that he was, knew how to exploit every conceivable channel to make his work known.

Voysey and 'The Studio'

In the 1880s and 1890s there were a number of specialist magazines for architects - *The British Architect*, *The Builder*, *The Building News*. . . . Then there were the art magazines *The Art-Journal*, which was long-established, and, by the time Voysey was beginning to emerge, a trifle stuffy. There were also *The Magazine of Art*, *The Portfolio*, *The Journal of Decorative Art and Decoration* - which, under the editorship of J. Moyr Smith seemed to almost caricature the mannerisms of the Aesthetic Movement. But *The Studio* was to become the principal vehicle through which the Voysey style became known to a very large international public.

The Studio, which first appeared in April 1893, was an altogether new kind of art magazine. Like *The Strand Magazine*, first issued in January 1891, which contained 'stories and articles by the best British writers . . . translations from the best foreign authors . . . illustrated by eminent artists', *The Studio* made extensive use of the half tone process for reproducing illustrations. This process, which had become possible on a commercial scale in the late 1880s, meant that the expensive and tedious processes of steel or wood engraving could be dispensed with. In addition, because a photographic process was involved, near-facsimiles of artists', or architects', drawings could now be published - without the all too often subjective, and frequently insensitive, interpretations of engravers. Architects and designers who could draw attractively came into their own. Voysey was a case in point. Since the invention of the half-tone process, the architect's sketch became an accepted art form. Its impact upon architecture has yet to be fully evaluated.

But there was more than a mere technical resemblance between *The Strand Magazine*, and *The Studio*. Both magazines were topical, informative and unpompous. Glee-

son White, 1852-1898, himself a designer, edited *The Studio* with extraordinary flair during its early years. Charles Holme, 1848-1923, was the publisher of *The Studio*. He was an entrepreneur - a former wool merchant and importer of bric-à-brac from the East - with an enthusiasm for the arts. In 1889 he had moved into William Morris's famous Red House, which had been designed by Philip Webb in 1859. Both Gleeson White and Holme cultivated Voysey.

The designer Frederick L. Mayers, who was a young man in the 1890s, described the impact of *The Studio*. He was writing in a seemingly unlikely place - *Carpet Designs and Designing*, 1934. Mayers remembers his 'delight when he turned over the pages of that first number'. He found that *The Studio* was 'something more significant than just another magazine for the dilettante, and that "Fine" and "Applied" art were given equal prominence'. It became more apparent with each succeeding number 'how valuable a "go-between" it was between art workers and the public . . .'. The name of 'many an art worker who was scarcely known outside the immediate circle in which he worked became . . . almost a household word'. Mayers noted the impact Aubrey Beardsley's black and white illustrations made: 'Whether it was supremely good judgement, or good luck, which brought Beardsley's work into the first number, it decided the success of the "Studio" and made Beardsley instantly famous . . .'. *The Studio* made Voysey famous too.

The Studio appealed to the rising generation of the artistically literate. Young people, one conjectures, whose parents had read Ruskin in the sixties and seventies and had given their children the illustrated books of Walter Crane, Randolph Caldecott, or Kate Greenaway to look at in their nurseries.

Voysey made an appearance in the first number of *The Studio*, of April 1893, with illustrations of a wallpaper for Jeffrey & Co. and a fretted metal grille for Essex & Company's wallpaper showrooms. He made his first major appearance, however, in the September issue, the sixth, in a lengthy interview conducted, one can assume, by Gleeson White. Voysey spoke about his approach to decorative design. It may well

ALL THE WORLD OVER



3. Trade mark for Essex & Company, wallpaper manufacturers, London.

Dekorative Kunst, I, 1897.

Essex & Company were early patrons of Voysey - he designed many wallpapers for the firm. R.W. Essex, the managing director, commissioned him to design his own house which, however, was completed by Walter Cave.

be that this is the earliest verbatim record of an interview with a designer to be published. The idea of the published interview would surely have come from *The Strand*.

Voysey designed the cover of *The Studio*. It shows two figures - one representing Beauty, holding a lily, the other representing Use holding, of all things, the governor which regulated the speed of a steam engine. The figures, Burne Jones-like and asexual, are embracing - indicating that there need be no conflict between function and aesthetic excellence. Voysey's reputation was to grow with that of *The Studio*. Both were soon to have an enormous international reputation. Both, too, were to have their imitators.

The Voysey House

The most important element in bringing about Voysey's success was the Voysey House. *The Studio* played a great part in making it widely known. The first appearance of the Voysey House was in the October issue of the 1894 *Studio*. It was a project for a house for himself and his young wife. It had probably been designed in 1885. The house is half-timbered - 'solid and tarred, bedded in and filled between with breeze concrete'. The roof was of green slate and the external woodwork was bright green - the colour which Voysey was always to favour. The green, it was claimed, would 'harmonize with the greens of surrounding

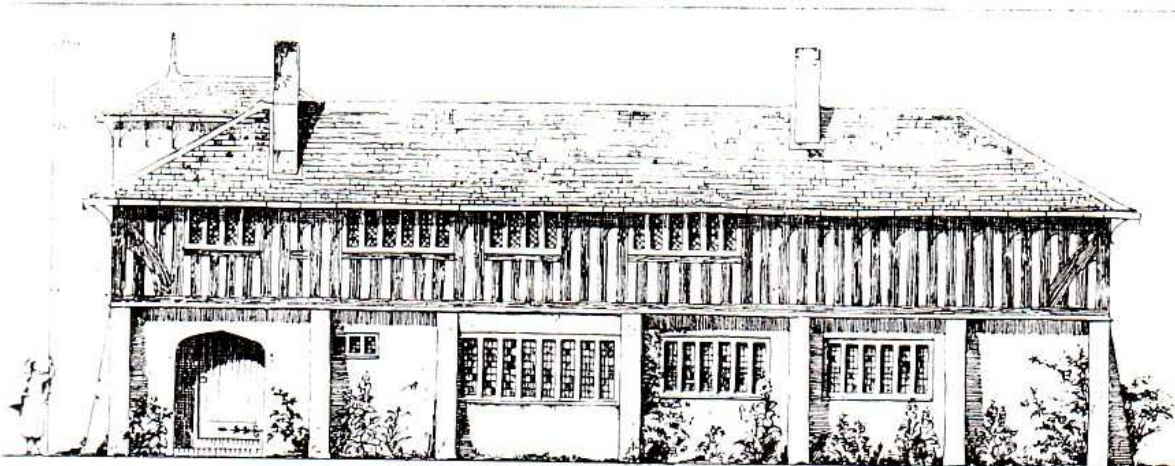
trees and hills'. Mouldings were generally omitted. Ventilation was by way of large ducts at the side of the chimneys - Voysey had learned about ventilation from Snell; it was a speciality of his. The picturesque little house was buttressed. This, essentially, was the Voysey House.

The 1897 issue of *The Studio* contained a ten-page article on Voysey - 'The Revival of English Domestic Architecture: The Work of Mr C.F.A. Voysey'. It is signed 'G'. Voysey's well-known house in Bedford Park, for J.W. Forster, of 1891, is illustrated - rough-cast and perfectly, but unfamiliarly, proportioned. It is confidently inserted among Norman Shaw's red-brick Queen Anne (see figure 6). There is also a perspective of the L-shaped house that Voysey built for his father in Platt's Lane, Hampstead - might the Devey legacy have paid for it? It is a typical Voysey house - unornamented and informal. It is buttressed in the Voysey manner (see figure 9). 'G' explained Voysey's reasons: 'to save the cost of thicker walls for the lower storey of his buildings . . . although . . . Mr Voysey would no more dream of adding a superfluous buttress than he would add an unnecessary panel of cheap ornament.'

'G' emphasised Voysey's ability to build cheaply but well. '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 miser-



4. Cover design for the first bound volume of *The Studio*, 1893. This design also appears on the cover of the first number, April 1893.



5. Design for Voysey's own cottage, c1885.

Dekorative Kunst, V, 1897.

This was never built. A slightly different version of this, together with plans, was illustrated

in *The Studio*, October, 1894.



6. House for J.W. Forster at Bedford Park, 1891
Illustrated in *The Studio*, XI, June 1897
Described originally as an artist's cottage, the house contrasted vividly with Richard Norman Shaw's redbrick Queen Anne. A wing added in 1894 has somewhat diminished the impact.

able shams of the jerry-builder. To beat the vulgar and badly constructed dwelling - on economic as well as artistic grounds - is a notable achievement. But that Mr Voysey has done it more than once remains an 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. . . .'

The first extensive continental account of Voysey's work was an anonymous article which appeared in *Dekorative Kunst*. This was a Munich monthly founded in 1897 and edited by H. Bruckmann and J.H. Meier-Graefe - the founder of the magazine *Pan*. It was closely modelled on *The Studio*. The article, which appeared in the sixth number of the magazine, contains copious illustrations of Voysey's architectural projects, furniture and textiles and wallpapers. The cost of making the fifty or so half-tone blocks would have been considerable. The article was the most ambitious which *Dekorative Kunst* had attempted. Its publication indicates quite clearly the high esteem in which Voysey was held in German-speak-

ing Europe. He evidently collaborated very closely with the writer of the article - might it have been Hermann Muthesius, the future author of *Das Englische Haus*, who was in London at the time? Four of Voysey's important houses are illustrated - Perrycroft (1893), Broadleys (1898), New Place (1897) and Norney (1897). Earlier designs are illustrated too, including the house which had appeared in *The British Architect* in 1889 (see figure 2), his own unbuilt studio cottage (see figure 5), as well as the Teignmouth sanatorium project. The illustration of these unexecuted projects, in styles he had partly abandoned, seems, at first sight, curious. But Voysey had a feeling for his personal history.

Horace Townsend, in 'Notes on Country and Suburban Houses designed by C.F.A. Voysey', in the April issue of *The Studio*, 1899, presented the Voysey House in its final form. The article is illustrated with seven examples - there were Broadleys and Moor Crag, the two important Windermere houses of 1898, as well as four projects which were never realized. Voysey often commissioned professional perspective artists to represent his houses. No doubt these were intended to impress his clients, but it seems likely that he also had the ulterior motive of seeing them published.

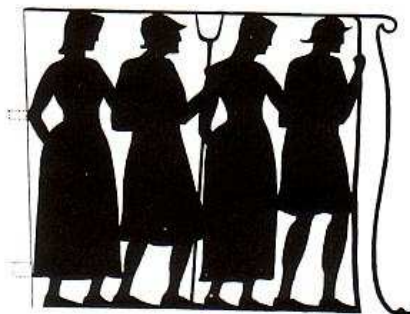
The six houses must have made an extraordinary impression - they still do. Ruskin wrote in *Fors Clavigera*, in 1874, of the need 'to let in the light' and 'to guide and administer the sunshine'. Voysey, a 'stickler for light', was letting in the 'sunshine' as no architect before him. William Morris in *News From Nowhere*, 1890, talked of the impact that the architecture of the twenty-first century had made in his dream: 'I was exhilarated to a pitch that I had never yet reached, I fairly chuckled for pleasure'. The buildings were 'handsome and generously solid . . . countryfied . . . like yeomens' dwellings'. The Voysey House was close to the buildings in Morris's vision of the future.

Townsend, a regular contributor to *The Studio*, described Voysey as a 'new architect'. He meant the kind of architect who designed everything for his houses. He cited E.W. Godwin, 1833-1886, who had designed

Whistler's White House, as someone who had overturned the absurd theory that the architect who wandered from 'the strait and narrow path and took to designing furniture, wallpapers, and so forth, had committed a species of professional suicide'. Voysey's decorative work was 'epoch making' - an expression, which for once, seems appropriate. Townsend asserted: 'His furniture, with its broad simple effects, its reliance on proportion, its eschewal of useless ornament, and its strikingly original lines, has helped to form a school of its own, while his wallpapers and textiles strike an equally personal and individual note. . . .'

Townsend wrote of Voysey's 'simplicity of thought and perfection of detail'. Then there was his 'deliberate avoidance of style'. With hindsight, it is easy to say that Voysey did not so much avoid style as invent a style - and a distinctive one at that. Let Townsend continue: 'by no slavish adherence to tradition has any living, breathing, architectural style come into being'. Of course, Voysey learned from the past. Nevertheless the sheer newness of the Voysey style, within the confines of its time, still strikes one most forcibly.

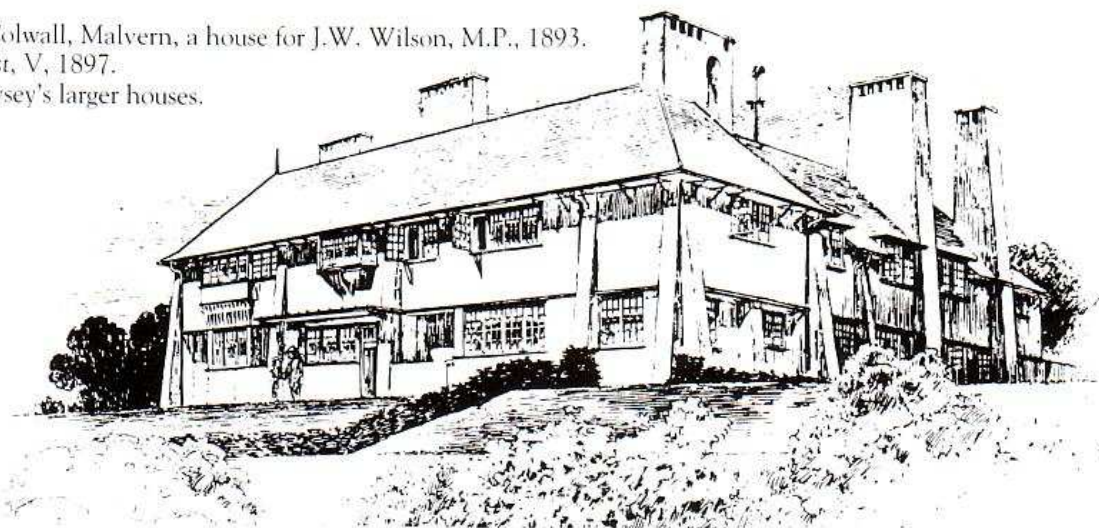
The Voysey House became famous internationally. Hermann Muthesius in *Das Englische Haus* 1904-05, which still remains the most useful survey of the English revival in domestic architecture, illustrated some of Voysey's best work. Voysey also appeared in Muthesius's *Das Moderne Landhaus* . . . 1905 (This looks very like a German version of the popular house book, *The British*

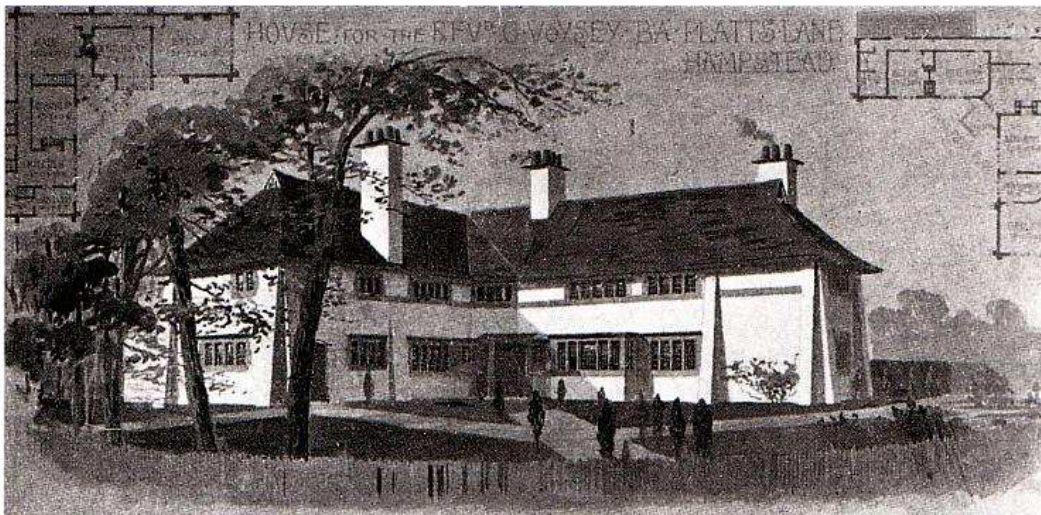


7. Design for a fretted metal panel for a staircase, in a house in Hans Road, Knightsbridge, designed by Voysey, for Archibald Grove, 1891-2. Julian Sturgis lived in this house.
The Studio, I, September, 1893.

Home of Today, 1904, edited by W. Shaw Sparrow. Here, of course, Voysey also features prominently.) In *Das Moderne Landhaus* Voysey was the most illustrated British architect - he is followed by Mackintosh, Ernest Newton, Baillie Scott, George Walton and Edgar Wood. It is interesting to see how 'British', in spirit, some of the work of German and Austrian architects actually is. By 1905, the lessons of the British domestic revival had been well absorbed. One senses this in the work of Leopold Bauer, Peter Behrens, Josef Hoffmann, Bernard Pankok, Bruno Paul, Hans Poelzig, Paul Troost and Hans Vollmer; as well as Gesellius, Lindgren and Saarinen, the Helsinki partnership. While Voysey evidently had European admirers, he did not have many actual imitators. However, the Viennese architects, Josef Frank and Robert Oerley, who became prominent just before the outbreak of the First World War, designed houses which are in the Voysey spirit.

8. Perrycroft, Colwall, Malvern, a house for J.W. Wilson, M.P., 1893.
Dekorative Kunst, V, 1897.
The first of Voysey's larger houses.





9. Annesley Lodge, Platt's Lane, Hampstead, 1895.

For Voysey's father, the Rev. Charles Voysey.

The Studio, XI, June 1897.

For Voysey buttresses were not an affectation - they enabled him to build lighter walls at ground-floor level, thus saving costs.

Voysey's Writings

With his rise to fame, Voysey felt the need to set out the theoretical - and ethical - basis of his thinking. Writing did not come easily to him. But he thought carefully about what he had to say and his sincerity and idealism are never in doubt.

In 'Ideas in Things', two lectures which are reproduced in *The Arts connected with Building*, 1909, edited by T. Raffles Davison, he railed against materialism. Materialism, which induced an excessive craving for sensation, prompted us to disregard reason. Sometimes his arguments are tenuous - as when he claimed that smooth polished, surfaces were 'materialistic', because they could be produced 'without brains'. In a sense, this is the Arts and Crafts argument, but stated tortuously.

An interesting passage in 'Ideas in Things' seems to savour a little of his father: 'The theory of evolution has disclosed . . . that all organisers are moving in the direction of greater fitness and harmony of condition. It is essential to fitness that objects should minister to our spiritual growth . . .'. This quite clumsy attempt to reconcile the material and spiritual antinomies is characteristic of the era.

On occasions, Voysey could be amusing. Here he is on modern domestic architec-

ture. Most of our houses looked like 'spectres that came and went in the twinkling of an eye, angularity and an infinite variety of shapes and proportions jutting out at you with surprising wildness, as if they were waving their arms impatiently and angrily . . . to add to their complexity they are composed of an infinite number of differently coloured materials and textures . . .'. It is our mad rush for wealth and material things that feeds on advertisement, until our very houses shout at us for attention'. In 1909, houses like those Voysey caricatures were appearing in droves in the prosperous suburbs.

Individuality, published in 1915, was Voysey's lengthiest piece of writing. It is nevertheless a small book without illustrations and a comparatively short text. Voysey was fifty-seven and his career had been blighted by the war.

The influences of Charles Voysey's religious teaching can be found on almost every page of *Individuality*. The book is not really a book on design. It is a series of statements of belief with some of the quality of the religious tract about them. Voysey begins with the statement: 'Let us assume there is a beneficent power that is all good and perfectly loving and that our existence here is for growing individual characters.' How like his father, who talked of 'a God intent on

the highest welfare of his creation', he sounds. 'Dogma', said Voysey, 'is deadening to progressive thought'. Surely, that was said in response to his boyhood recollections of the tribulations of his father, who had suffered at the hands of dogmatists.

Voysey's hatred of materialism surfaces again: 'A generation or so is devoted to material needs and brings forth the engine and the motor and machines in all their manifold forms, making even man into a machine'. This is Ruskinian. A new form of spirituality would surely arise. He must have had the benign religion his father taught in mind.

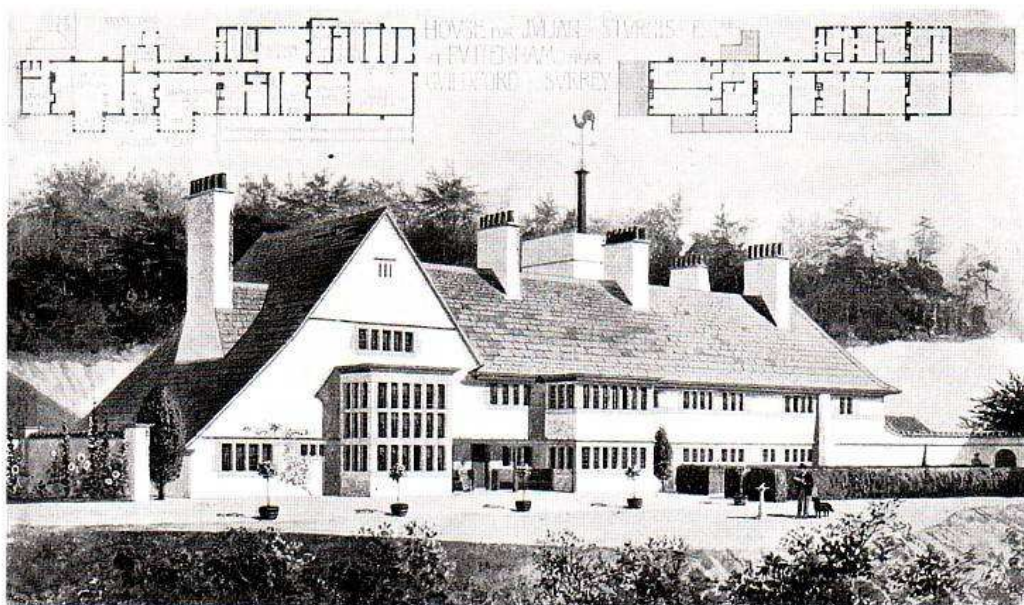
The war, which brought suffering, would 'stimulate the growth of our virtues' - suffering as a necessary condition of spiritual progress. Very much the kind of thing Voysey's father had said.

To turn now, briefly, to matters of design. While mediaeval craftsmen had understood 'the spiritual origin of nature', we had lost our way. If only we could approach nature with the humility of our forebears, our work would remain 'fresh in the hearts of men for generations to come, when our names may be forgotten'. How innocent Voysey sounds to us, for whom, as Yeats says the 'ceremony of innocence is drowned',

when he remarks: 'sincere thought and feeling is transmittable through things material, soul responds to soul . . .'

Individuality is partly a diatribe against what Voysey called 'collectivism'. Individuality had to be cherished as the state had become all-powerful. The idea of individual responsibility had to be fostered. The Edwardian vogue for the revival of the architectural style known as 'English Renaissance' - the style of Inigo Jones, Wren, Gibbs, and the style which was adopted by Lutyens was, according to Voysey, a manifestation of the collectivist spirit - the herd instinct driving people to follow fashion. The objection to Renaissance architecture is, obviously, Ruskinian. Our public buildings built in the neo-Renaissance manner were 'silent, dead, soulless piles of mortifying insincerity'.

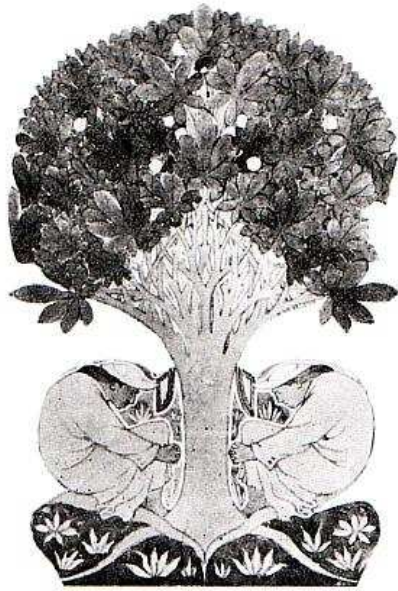
This strange, sometimes bitter, book ends with the prediction that the outcome of the war will be to 'force men to distinguish more clearly between intellectual and spiritual culture, and thus to encourage the latter and . . . strengthen and sustain individuality'. Voysey's prognosis was wrong. Two decades later Europe was to see the apparent triumph of what Auden called 'collective man'.



House for the writer Julian Sturgis, at Puttenham, the Hog's Back, near Guildford, 1896.

Decorative Kunst, V, 1897.

Known variously as Merlshanger, Wancote and Grey Friars - its present name, this was probably the most widely illustrated of Voysey's houses in contemporary publications.



11. Design originally for a wallpaper frieze c.1893. *The Studio*, I, September, 1893. The design was known as 'The Minstrel' in its wallpaper version; as a woven fabric, produced by Alexander Morton & Co., it was known as 'The Pilgrim' (see Linda Parry, *Textiles of the Arts and Crafts Movement*, 1988, where a portion of the design is reproduced in colour).

Voysey's Decoration

Voysey started producing wallpaper and textile designs soon after he went into practice on his own in 1881. Trade was generally poor. Architectural commissions would have been hard to get, especially by an untried young architect. He probably turned to designing decoration in order to survive.

Voysey had learned the 'mechanical part' of decorative design in Seddon's office in particular - how to devise original motifs based upon plant drawings. He would also have learned the various forms of putting motifs into repeat. The acquisition of these skills would not have been taxing for anyone versed in applied geometry. During his time in Seddon's office Voysey was asked to paint a mural of angelic figures in one of his churches. It is difficult to imagine any such mural not incorporating decorative motifs. Voysey always had a penchant for angels. His simple, almost naive, figures would have been well suited to a mediaevalizing building.

Voysey learned little about decorative design from George Devey. For, fine

draughtsman that he was, there is no evidence that he was accomplished in decorative design. Similarly, Snell could have had no part in Voysey's education in decorative design.

Arthur Heygate Mackmurdo, 1851-1942 and The Century Guild

It was A.H. Mackmurdo who first encouraged Voysey to develop a sideline in decorative design. Mackmurdo, also an architect, designed textiles for The Century Guild - an idealistic Morrisian association of designers - of which he had been a founder member in 1882. The guild aimed 'to render all branches of art the sphere no longer of the tradesman but the artist'. The writer and designer Aymer Vallance, 1862-1943, in 'Mr. Arthur H. Mackmurdo and the Century Guild', *The Studio*, April 1899, recalled that Voysey, while never a member, was in close contact with the guild for a number of years. Like other designers, he had resorted to it for 'advice, encouragement and sympathy'. Very likely, Mackmurdo would have given Voysey advice on the requirement of textile and wallpapers manufacturers. In 1883, Voysey sold his first wallpaper designs. The earliest Voysey decorative design in the RIBA Drawings Collection, however, dates from about 1887.

Mackmurdo is an interesting figure. His first essays in building reveal that he was stumbling towards the radical architectural position at which Voysey was actually to arrive. Mackmurdo, Vallance declared, had emancipated himself from 'prim Neo-Gothic artificiality'. Pevsner wrote that Mackmurdo's work was more original and more adventurous than that of any British architect during the decade 1880-1890 - 'which is tantamount to saying the work of any European architect'. While Pevsner may have been inclined to over-stress Mackmurdo's significance, it is evident that he is worthy of a more extended study than he has yet been accorded - if only because he was the pivot around which the Century Guild revolved. Other guild members include Selwyn Image, 1849-1930, a devout Ruskinian and a poet, who had relinquished

holy orders in 1883. Image became Master of the Art Workers' Guild in 1900 and was Slade Professor at Oxford from 1910-1916. There was also Herbert Horne, 1864-1916, who had become Mackmurdo's pupil in 1883 and his partner in 1885. He retired at the age of thirty-six to Florence and bequeathed his collection and his house to the city.

Almost certainly, the most memorable achievement of the Century Guild was the publishing of *The Hobby Horse*, a periodical which propagated its ideals, published between 1884 and 1891. It was sophisticated in both graphic and literary terms.

Volume III of *The Hobby Horse*, which was published in 1888, contains facsimiles of the work of 16th century Florentine printers. An interest in any aspect of typography was remarkable in the 1880s. Contemporary typography was all too often coarse and ugly. *The Hobby Horse* was a notable exception. It is said that William Morris was inspired to set up his Kelmscott Press after encountering the elegant and urbane *Hobby Horse*.

The members of the Century Guild circle were aesthetes, in the sense in which the word is especially associated with the eighteen-eighties - when the writings of Walter Pater, or Matthew Arnold were at their most influential. Beauty was cultivated as a substitute for God. The Century Guild was Ruskinian in the manner of *Fors Clavigera*. 'Fors', as it became known, was addressed to the 'workmen and labourers of Great Britain'. It was entirely written by Ruskin and is filled with his invectives against industrialization - its despoilment of the earth and its degrading of humanity. Voysey moved, in the 1880s, in the Century Guild circle, but significantly he never joined the guild. While he could wring his hands at the ills of his time, he had a deep dislike of anything which savoured of socialism - Morrisian socialism included. Although he did not specifically attack socialism in *Individuality*, it is clear that he saw it as a manifestation of his hated 'collectivism'.

Whatever influence Seddon or Mackmurdo had upon Voysey as a decorative designer, it is essential to take into account the fact that he grew up at a time

when there was a very great deal of interest taken in decoration. By the time he joined Seddon's office in 1873 a considerable literature on decoration, as well as many magnificent pattern books, existed. Pugin's *Glossary of Ecclesiastical Ornament*, 1844 and his *Floriated Ornaments*, 1849, have already been cited. Following in Pugin's wake, there was a widespread belief that decoration should carry a meaning - symbolic or didactic. The ultimate expression of 'didactic' decoration can be seen in the University Museum, Oxford, which was under construction in the late 1850s. It was designed by the Dublin partnership Deane and Woodward, under the influence, though not with the entire approval, of Ruskin. Here capitals, carved into the forms of native British flora and fauna, were intended to educate the townspeople and the students of Oxford in the ways of nature.



12. Arthur Heygate Mackmurdo.
Design for a cretonne, 1880.
The Studio, XVI, April, 1899.

Ornament books advocating natural forms as models for decoration abounded. The subject became known as 'art botany'. The Scottish painter William Dyce, 1806-64, Director of the Government School of Design, at Somerset House, in the early 1840s, published a teaching manual - *The Drawing Book of the Government School of Design*, 1842-3, which explained the way in

which more or less naturalistic plant drawings could be arranged ornamentally. Although, it is hardly necessary to remark, ornament derived from plant forms is of the utmost antiquity, nineteenth century designers were to become fixated with the idea of nature as the supreme inventor of form. Natural forms - of a complexity and diversity beyond human imagining - reassured many people, during a time when faith was in crisis, that God might yet exist as a Supreme Designer. Lip service might be paid to conventional religion - as Ruskin often did - but an undertow of pantheism can be detected in much nineteenth-century thought. One senses this, too, in Voysey's love of nature.

There were many pattern books illustrating plant-based decorative design - besides Pugin's *Floriated Design* - which Voysey could have been influenced by during his formative years. Among these were: Owen Jones's *Grammar of Ornament*, 1856, the final chapter of which is devoted to botanical illustrations which were intended as an inspiration for ornamental designers; there were also Christopher Dresser's books; F. Edward Hulme's *Plant Form*, 1868; and Richard Redgrave's *Manual of Design*, 1876, published by the South Kensington Museum, which set out the approved method of generating plant-based decoration. However, the architect J.K. Colling's *Art Foliage*,

1865, was the standard work used by Gothic Revival architects - if Colling's design is a little too mechanical for our taste, *Art Foliage* is a very serviceable pattern book. Like Pugin's books, one would have expected to find it among the reference works in Seddon's office.

Voysey, in his interview in *The Studio*, of September, 1893, described his attitude towards nature as a source of inspiration:

'To go to Nature is, of course, to approach the fountain-head, but a literal transcript will not result in good ornament; before a living plant a man must go through an elaborate process of selection and analysis, and think of the balance, repetition and many of the qualities of design, thereby calling his individual taste into play and adding a human interest to his work. If he does that, although he has gone directly to Nature, his work will not resemble (that of) any of his predecessors, he has become an inventor.'

The 'elaborate process of selection and analysis' of which Voysey spoke - 'conventionalizing' was the contemporary term, where we would probably use 'stylizing' - had been, by 1893, taught to two generations of designers. The rationale of conventional decorative design, which was practised by Pugin, Owen Jones or Richard Redgrave, had become part of the studio folklore of designers. It was, like some of the



13. Proposed house for C.S. Loch, at Oxshott, Surrey, 1898. *The Studio*, XVI, April, 1899.

Voysey used bays in a number of his houses at around this time of which Broadleys, Lake Windermere, 1898, is the best known example.

ideas of the Modern Movement, accepted quite uncritically. The cult of conventional design had its origins in the 1840s when intensive studies of mediaeval and, to a lesser extent, oriental decoration were initiated. Owen Jones, in *The Grammar of Ornament*, 1856, in proposition 13, (the propositions were axioms of good taste), stated that in decoration only conventional representations of 'flowers or other natural objects' which were 'sufficiently suggestive to convey the intended image to the mind' should be used. Thus rule was 'universally obeyed in the best periods of Art', and 'violated only when art declines'.

Voysey, of course, was part of a movement in architecture - a very vigorous one. He was similarly part of a movement in decorative design - the members of which had sought to raise national standards. Lewis F. Day, in 'The Art of William Morris', the Easter Art Annual, *The Art-Journal*, 1899, described this movement, with reference to Morris, of course. But his account remains one of the best summaries of the sequence of events:

'Morris was born just at the right moment: the way was prepared for him. Walter Scott, without really appreciating Gothic art, had called popular attention to its romance. Rickman had long since 'discriminated' the style of English Architecture. Pugin had established his *True Principles of Gothic Architecture* and was designing all manner of mediaeval furniture; and by the time (Morris) came to take any heed of art, Gothic architecture was the fashion. Shaw (presumably Henry Shaw - author of *The Encyclopaedia of Ornament*, 1842, and *Dresses and Decoration of the Middle Ages*, 1843) and others had published books on mediaeval antiquities and Viollet-le-Duc his famous dictionary; even Owen Jones, the orientalist, had cleared the ground, by creating a reaction of taste against mere naturalism pretending to be design. Fergusson, (James Fergusson, the architect and historian), Freeman, (presumably Edward A. Freeman, the authority on mediaeval architecture), Semper, (Gottfried Semper, the German architect and theorist), Wornum, (Ralph Nicholson Wornum, Keeper of the National Gallery, who had published *Analysis*

of Ornament in 1856) Digby Wyatt, (Matthew Digby Wyatt, a major architect, with an interest in decoration) and above all, Ruskin, had been writing about art until people were beginning to listen. Men like William Burges and E.W. Godwin were hard at work already: there was reaction in the air: the times were ready for the man - the man was William Morris.'

Among Voysey's own generation the following designers continued to advance the art of decoration: Charles Harrison Townsend, 1851-1928, the architect of the Whitechapel Art Gallery and the Horniman Museum; George Heywood Sumner, 1853-1940, historian and designer; Arthur Silver, 1853-1896, founder of the successful Silver Studio; George C. Haité, 1855-1924, decorative designer and illustrator - he was one of the first illustrators employed by *The Strand Magazine*; Harry Napper, 1860-1940, who became manager of the Silver Studio after Arthur's death; May Morris, 1862-1938, William Morris's younger daughter and a leading embroiderer; Henry Wilson, 1864-1934, a leading arts and crafts architect; M.H. Baillie Scott, 1865-1945, whose influence on domestic architecture possibly equalled Voysey's; and Lindsay Butterfield, 1869-1948, who was, together with Voysey, among the most successful decorative designers of the era. All, like Voysey it is hardly necessary to add, were skilled in transforming natural forms into decoration.

From the earlier generation, two designers are likely to have had a great influence on Voysey. These were Walter Crane and Lewis F. Day. Lewis Foreman Day, 1845-1910, is probably best known today for his textbooks on decoration - they have yet to be bettered and remain in regular use. The first of these was *Instances of Necessary Art*, 1880. Day was also an excellent designer himself. He was a founder member of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society in 1887. Walter Crane, 1845-1915, the first president of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, was successful as both an illustrator - he was a pioneer of illustration for children - and as a decorative designer. His textbooks, however, did not appear until a decade and a half after Voysey had established himself as a decorative designer. Voysey's

pictorial textiles and wallpapers suggest, very strongly, the influence of Crane. Crane had, much earlier than Voysey, in 'Sing a Song of Sixpence', a wallpaper for Jeffrey & Co of 1875, demonstrated the role of pictorial design in brightening the nursery and stimulating the minds of the very young.

In its themes and its components - its elements - Voysey's decoration is typical of the 1880s and 1890s. Voysey's decorative ideas, almost all of them, were formed during these two decades. Like other Arts and Crafts designers, he did not seek to break free of tradition. He did, however, discourage dependency upon past styles for inspiration. In *Individuality*, 1915, he wrote that 'if we cast behind us all preconceived styles, our work will still possess a style, but it will be a living, natural and true expression of modern needs and ideals: not an insincere imitation of other nations and other times'.

Like so many of his contemporaries, Voysey looked forward to the revitalization of rural life and society. The importance of reviving the life of the countryside - as an antidote to the ravages wrought by industrialization - is, of course, highly explicit in the writings of Ruskin and Morris. Their views also relate, in part, to the long-standing pastoral traditions of British literature and art which is exemplified in the writings of Blake, Coleridge, or Wordsworth, and in those of an architect, turned writer, Thomas Hardy. It is also manifest in the paintings of such artists as Richard Wilson, Constable and Palmer.

Voysey's decorative *oeuvre* fits comfortably into the niche labelled 'Arts and Crafts'. To say so is in no way to underestimate his achievement - for he was as accomplished a designer of wallpapers and textiles as any of his contemporaries. Voysey's decoration was, in a very real sense, archetypically Arts and Crafts. It certainly answered Morris's call that decoration should be - 'something that will not drive us into unrest or into callowness; something which reminds us of life beyond itself . . .'. 'Life beyond itself?' - surely Morris meant the life of the fields and the hedgerows. Nature was seen as a soothing, healing, agent. Morris's era, Voysey's era, was as preoccupied with the problem of isolation - alienation - in society as our

own. Decorative design was seen as having a therapeutic role to play.

An aspect of Voysey's decoration which will strike anyone who compares it with the generality of late nineteenth century design, is that it is unlaboured. There is an intentional lack of mechanical preciseness: an informality, which one does not find in, for example, the decoration of Morris, Day or Crane. The same qualities, though impossible to be entirely specific about, are to be found in Voysey's colour schemes. During the 1850s an elaborate 'science of colour harmony' had been developed - its complex rules account for twenty-one of the 37 propositions in *The Grammar of Ornament* (in a popular form, Dresser re-stated them in Cassell's *The Technical Educater*, 1870-72). The rules of colour harmony were taught to design students for many years. Voysey, evidently an intuitive colourist, ignored the strictures of this inhibiting pseudo-science. His colouring is invariably pleasing. It was widely imitated - M.H. Baillie Scott's colour schemes being a case in point.

Voysey is not a curious anomaly - the proto-modern born before his time, although Modernists were all too-inclined to claim him for themselves. His work seems to hint at a coming, more perfect, world. We feel a certain nostalgia for the age which brought forth such visions. But the visions were shattered beyond repair by the unspeakable events of the Great War.

'Let every bit of ornament speak to us of bright and healthy thought', wrote Voysey in 'Ideas in Things', 1909. Such idealism - essentially the idealism of Plato, (although there is no shred of evidence that Voysey ever read Plato) - seems altogether too simplistic for us to take entirely seriously now. But it is part and parcel of Voysey. The Voysey who is so like, yet so unlike, his contemporaries. His work is both naive and sophisticated, childlike and wise.

Yeats in a well-known four-line poem of 1933, dedicated to the artist Edmund Dulac - 'The Nineteenth Century and After' - mourned the century's passing and likened it to 'a great song'. Voysey, with his delicacy of expression, his poetic sensibility, was part of that great song.