

Obituary

C. F. A. VOYSEY [F.]

Mr. Howard Robertson [F.] writes :

The name of C. F. A. Voysey is already included in architectural history.

The present chaos will never obliterate the widespread influence which, in his prime, he exerted on continental domestic architects ; and when his biography is written, as it surely will be, the pioneering quality of his buildings, with their complete independence of character, will bring home to English architects the reasons why Voysey so richly deserved the award of the Royal Gold Medal.

The little personal idiosyncracies in Voysey's work, the buttresses, the high-waisted interiors, a certain consciousness of arts and crafts, are now outmoded. But these things were in trend prophetic of a later era when design went through that process of cleaning up, of space making, which is one of the genuine contributions of the contemporary movement.

There is something indubitably permanent, however, in Voysey's achievement of mass and grouping, and his furtherance of homely traditional style in his masses of white wall, grouped windows and stretches of grey-green roof. These, in their day, startled layman and architect alike by the simplicity of the appeal which they made on behalf of form and materials happily combined.

A Crusadership for what he considered rightness both in architecture and man's conduct, a creativeness which included—years ago—a fully formulated scheme for a materials building centre, a friendly combativeness which never descended to animosity, and an individuality in small endearing things, make C. F. A. Voysey a figure to be missed.

But his contribution to architecture, like that of all artists who express deep convictions, is so real that his reputation will surely grow in the years to come.

Mr. Noel D. Sheffield [F.] writes :

SIR,—My first introduction to Charles Voysey came about in rather a curious way. For nearly three years in the late 'nineties I went regularly every Saturday afternoon to the Saturday Popular Co. certs held in the old St. James's Hall in Piccadilly, to listen to the Joachim and other string quartettes. My constant neighbour in the 18. seats in the orchestra after some months spoke to me, and we became friendly. I was impressed to find he was Herbert Voysey, the younger brother of Charles. Herbert, knowing my admiration for Charles, thought he could get me into his brother's office as an improver. One Saturday we took an electric cab, then a great novelty, as far as Baker Street, travelling at the break-neck speed of about 20 miles per hour. I spent the week end at the house of his father, the Revd. Charles Voysey, who had a considerable following at the Theistic Church in Swallow Street, Piccadilly. His house, designed by Charles, Junior, was in Platts Lane, Hampstead, and I well remember the thrill when I saw my first Voysey house.

There was a war in progress when I first entered Voysey's office at 23 York Place, Baker Street, but there was then no interference with building or other amenities in civil life.

Charles Voysey had a horror of anything commercial, and there was certainly nothing commercial about the way in which he ran his office.

There was no typist, no typewriter, no telephone, and no paid staff. He wrote all his own letters. Voysey loved his work, and worked hard. He was a marvellously quick and skilled draughtsman, his drawings being made in pencil on Whatman's paper, and coloured. Owing to his speed, the paper of the finished drawing was as clean as when he started. He seldom used india-rubber. Photo prints were not in vogue in those days, and all drawings had to be traced by his small staff.

Voysey had a great dislike of building restrictions, and felt he should make his own bye-laws. Although a very kindly man, he was autocratic with his clients and probably lost work for this reason. He said the only satisfactory client was one who went abroad whilst the house was building.

His houses had a reputation for cheapness, but they were not cheap, except by comparison with the ornate domestic buildings that had so recently been the vogue. His construction was sometimes extravagant, and there was often waste of material. The roof collars were halved and dovetailed to the rafters in contrast to the modern method of fixing with two or three nails. Central heating was then not much in use, so with fireplaces in every bedroom, he made a feature of his plain stacks with their black pots. His buildings were mostly of rough cast facing, sometimes with tarred plinths, with Bath stone or local stone flush dressings to window openings, and nearly always the mullions were of stone with iron casements and lead lights. Roofs were generally of Westmorland slates. External paint was always bright green. He started the vogue for buttresses, which were appropriate when under the eaves, but not so pleasing on the face of the gable ends. Voysey designed many articles in use in a house in metal and wood, and he said the architect should design everything even down to the tooth-picks.

Voysey's furniture, though different from anything previously seen, was to me the least interesting part of his work, although some of it was fine. The chairs were uncomfortable.

His designs for wall-papers, fabrics and carpets were original and charming, both in design and colour.

When I was with him he was designing some of his best works and his host of imitators had hardly started.

He had just finished a house at Sandgate for H. G. Wells, and I remember Wells calling at the office, but his name was then unknown to me, although he had had some success with "The Wheels of Chance" and "Love and Mr. Lewisham."

Voysey's leaning was towards Gothic, and he had, I think, a real dislike for Classic or Renaissance, and I remember him referring to Wren as "poor creature," a usual expression of his when he disagreed with someone's views.

I wrote to him when he received the Institute Gold Medal, and he replied, but I felt the honour came too late to be appreciated by the old man.

Although he had many admirers and many adverse critics, he was not, in 1900, thought of as the pioneer which he undoubtedly was.

My early enthusiasm for Voysey's work still remains after forty years of mature judgment.

MR. C. F. A. VOYSEY'S CAREER

Mr. C. F. A. Voysey was born in 1857. He was articled to J. P. Seddon for five years and subsequently worked as an "improver" in George Devey's office. The following is a list of some of his better-known works :—

Convalescent Home, Dorking (near), Surrey. *Cottage Hospital*, Beaworthy, Devon. *Cottages*, Elmsthorpe, Bradfield, Berks. *Factory* at Chiswick, for Messrs. Sanderson's. *Houses*, Bedford Park, Chiswick; Castlemorton, Worcs.; Chorley Wood, *The Orchard* (his own former home); Compton, *Prior's Field*; Frinton-on-Sea, *The Homestead*; Godalming, *Norney*; Guildford (near), *Littleholme* and *Wancote*; Haslemere, *New Place*; Hillingdon; Malvern, *Perrycroft*; Studland Bay; Windermere, *Broadleys Inn*, Stetchworth, *White Horse Office Building*, New Broad Street, E.C. *War Memorials*, Malvern Wells, Potters Bar, York Minster; King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry (won in competition).

Mr. Voysey was the author of two books, *Reason as a Basis of Art*, a pamphlet published in 1906, and *Individuality*, published in 1915. An exhibition of his work was held at the Batsford Gallery in 1931. He was master of the Art Workers' Guild in 1924.