

## HOMES OF CHARACTER

### VII. The French Chateau

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*Photos by, courtesy of Ludowici-Celadan*

WHEN one turns to French architecture for inspiration the gaiety and ornate splendor of the periods of the late Louis suggests itself to one's mind, and the endless facades of the Louvre and the gorgeous palaces and splendid fountains of Versailles are spread out before us. The motion pictures, in their search for Romance with a capital R, rub in all of this splendor with their near-reproductions of the halls of kings. No one today would feel at home in such grandeur, not even the few kings and queens that are left. Thrilling as all of this magnificence may be, it is not for us. Inspiration for a modern home is to be found elsewhere.

In Normandy are many charming villages similar to and oftentimes more thrilling than the old English hamlets. Our thousands of soldiers and war workers have brought back to us from France a new conception of the life and romance of the French people themselves and their humble homes, which differ little from the picturesque rural dwellings of earlier times. We are grateful for these pictures, and for this new appreciation, but, apart from sentiment, we must realize that the intriguing atmosphere of the French countryside is due, in great measure, to the nonchalant air of neglect and utter lack of anything like neatness. Architecturally speaking, the English cottage, which was discussed last month, is far superior to the French cottage as a precedent for a modern home.

More appropriate for our French example is the architecture of the beginning of the sixteenth century, in the region of the Loire Valley, the Garden of France, at that time the seat of the French government.

In contrast to the Church building of the previous era, the architecture of this period was domestic in character. With release from the domination of the Church and the passing of feudal animosities, the life of the individual became comparatively free and safe, and the country house in the modern sense was here first conceived.

This era marked the beginning of the Renaissance movement in France, which developed during the succeeding reigns of the kings from the time of Louis XI to that of Henry III and covered about a century of time. There had been practically no construction work of any kind done in France during the devastating, unsafe times of the Hundred Years War. Upon the accession of Louis XI, brigandage disappeared, and with peace came prosperity and building. As if they had been asleep, the people took up their tools from where they had been laid down a hundred years before and continued building in the same spirit of mediæval tradition. The revival of classic art, which had become established in Italy some years before, was slow

*This farm building near Montresor, has an interesting tower, which achieves beauty through its simplicity and fine proportions.*

*At the right, the deserted residence in the village of Courcay is of stucco covered stone, with smooth contrasting stone for the trim around the windows, doors, and at the corners.*

*The group of farm buildings below reminds one of a miniature castle on a moat. Notice that almost every type of small house roof is represented here—a very interesting combination in this particular group, but not at all advisable for one of our small homes.*

to take effect in France. Its influence at first appears only in minor points of detail, bits of Renaissance ornament here and there, and a chapel or two in some of the Churches; after the expeditions into Italy of Charles VIII, successor to Louis XI, it began to gain impetus.

It seems that Charles VIII was an ambitious diplomat who believed in extending his kingdom by strategy, by diplomacy, in fact by any means short of war. He was not a fighter. Through his marriage with Anne of Brittany he brought her provinces under his control, enlarging the boundaries of France almost to the extent of the territory which she occupies on the map today. Through the death of René I, the Count of Provence, the crown inherited the honorary title of King of Naples. This sounded interesting to Charles, who immediately conceived himself as actual king of all Italy, and at once set about taking possession of his new kingdom. Out of courtesy for his honorary title he secured invitations and the necessary passes, and arranged a triumphal expedition, his royal cortège conducting itself like a victorious army throughout the peninsula of Italy. But Italy was not so easily won as Anne of Brittany, and when his purpose was comprehended he found himself in a hornets' nest, and had to do some real fighting to get back to his beloved France.

His expedition, though unsuccessful from a standpoint of conquest, made him acquainted with the new and unusual style of building in Italy. The splendor of his passage, moreover, impressed Italian artisans with the fact that there were other fields for their art, and many of them followed in the wake of his return; one of these was the great Leonardo da Vinci.

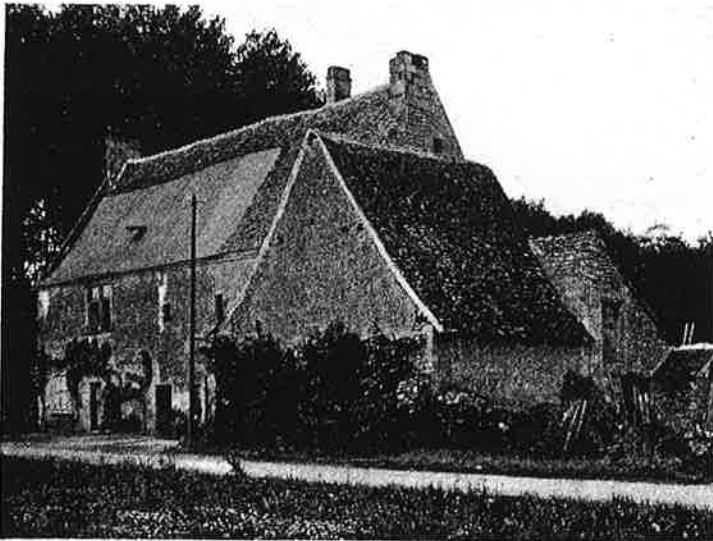
After this there were many other expeditions into Italy, equally unsuccessful politically; but all of this polite warfare enabled France to study Italian building and stimulated the Renaissance in France. Gradually ornamental work took on new form, and windows and walls were treated in a horizontal manner. This does not mean that the Italian manner was copied; it was rather a natural transition from their favorite Gothic traditions, which, structurally, carried over far into the new movement. The roofs, particularly, descending from the Gothic cathedral, remained high and pinnacled, maintaining a





*Above—A section of a small manor house of a family in better circumstances in its day than the peasant class.*

*Below—A cottage grouping in a hamlet of Touraine, not differing greatly from a type of old English cottage.*



goodly portion of the building within the roof story.

It is this phase of French architecture, purely domestic, which lends itself to adaptation in the designing of a modern home. In studying the style, let us not try to copy, but to absorb and express in our own language something of the spirit of these early Renaissance builders of France.

A French engineer once said to me, in the course of a conversation in regard to some construction work, "We have the beautiful old buildings; you have the modern plumbing." Beautiful though they may be we would not transplant any of these old structures to this country, nor would we build a house like any of them. In our French home let us hold to our modern plumbing, acquire as much as possible of the finished neatness of the English cottage, and see if France can give us some ideas as to how these things may be clothed beautifully.

Yes, we would have a house that has the air of a treasured Paris gown, simple, with beautiful lines, appropriate on any occasion and decidedly French. All this would we have in our chic little house, a delicate order indeed for our architects, I assure you, with all the other limitations of cubage and cost that have been put upon them. As a justification of the "French air" we shall try to ascertain what are some of the outstanding characteristics of the old work, and to understand which are adaptable to modern conditions.

As the characteristics of people are evident in their figures, their manner, their facial expression, so do buildings manifest the spirit of those who erect them. Some one will say, "How can an American, an Englishman, or a German erect a French house?" Only in so far as he is able to make this spirit a part of himself in his building can he do so. If in his heart there is no sympathy and love for the creator of the original work, it cannot be done. Building is human. The whole gamut of feelings and emotions may be expressed through the medium of building. Lack of character in building indicates lack of human understanding.

Is there any human sympathy expressed in the characterless rows of wooden boxes being erected for homes in some of our modern suburbs, mere tinder, inviting wholesale conflagration? Their repulsive ugliness reeks with vicious disregard for human life and property, an insult to the materials of which they are constructed.

It is difficult for us to find any French buildings which, to us, do not seem to be over-ornamented, and for the modern house of moderate cost we are obliged to forego practically all ornament; but if one will imagine any of the old chateau stripped of all decoration, it will be realized that their real beauty lies in the proportion of their masses and the picturesque silhouettes of

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