THE interest attaching to house-building is inexhaustible. People will go on discussing the problems of formal gardens and informal houses—and, let us hope, enjoying the argument—until the end of time. There are so many ways in which the subject may be treated; some of them fallacious, fanciful, idealistic and, as the French say, “impossible!” But one aspect, from its newness, still deserves close study: that is, the practical.

First of all, I would deny the practicality of attempts to reproduce in America the famous houses and gardens of the Old World; as for instance, Hampton Court and Haddon Hall, Le Petit Trianon, or the Boboli Gardens in Florence. It were better otherwise to employ the time, energy and money necessary for such imitations, which are, furthermore, doomed to failure. But I do mean that the building problems in themselves should be approached in the same liberal, great-hearted spirit as that which produced the happy results in the famous cases quoted. There should be boldness, freedom, bravura in treatment; at the same time, an economy of skill, and of effect. In a word, the architect and the landscape gardener should plan and construct with one eye on the present, and two on the future.

For whatever good reason the landscape gardener has of late passed to a new and somewhat grave mood, his innate love of nature, tender and true, does not rob him to-day of the willingness to assist the architect in his endeavor to make the house fit the landscape and the landscape the house. He is willing to terrace, trench, build up, hollow out, wall in, or hedge round, so that the house may seem at home, and the walls will not have to wait for the mellowing hand of time to soften their rude outline; so that the human habitation may be at once a welcome tenant and comrade of the soil, an agreeable and integral portion of the landscape; so that the sun may smile alike on the house and on the tree, without prompting the question: “Who built that house on the hill-side, with so little sense of beauty?”

The most admirable quality of Old-world country seats is breadth of treatment and repose; not detail, of which there is little in many
Block plan of Suburban Homes
Gateway and road
Detail of the "Suburban Homes" problem
of the hedge-bound tracts of land, and still less in the houses themselves. There is space, simplicity, symmetry. Therein lies the difference between the old and the new. In our own country, we find abundance of detail, a bustling activity, if I may be permitted the expression,—an action such as is necessary upon the stage, where fineness of proportion is obscured and incident accentuated and emphasized. The perfection of form found in the old country houses of England and the continent came from skilled artists who were not led astray by pretty, insignificant motifs, bearing slight or no relation to the principal theme. These architects had the same sense of proportion as the old masters of painting, who, even when working upon a miniature scale, subtly delineated character and gave the impression of life: a characteristic also possessed by some of the modern Frenchmen, such as Meissonier and Carolus-Duran.
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Thus we find in various European examples, ten-acre areas which are types of clever planning, skilful contrivance and wise use of detail, and cases are not wanting even, in which an acre and a half becomes a palace of dreams, as is witnessed by the smiling photographs illustrating our popular magazines.

The architects of the type cited could have handled a farm so as to make it a comfortable and attractive dwelling-place for a number of families. Why can not we do the same? Time has not changed the face of nature, or the needs of men. We live in similar rooms, but the windows of our houses look out upon different scenes.

Another comparison can be made between the old European house-building and the new style practised in America. The old houses are unified with the landscape. Ours are not. With us there seems to be a survival from rude times of the belief that a man may do as he likes with his own, and this prejudice would seem often to prevent the agreement of neighbors, the acceptance of a common line, level, road, and boundary,—of one general scheme whereby the country-side would be the better for the houses built, and the plan, or “lay-out” would “tell” and count for something more than a number of dwellings, possibly well-designed and faithfully constructed, but having nothing in common with one another and no sympathy with the soil. We are perforce the children of our time, and can scarcely wait for trees to grow, roads to harden and fences to form solid, even boundary lines in harmony alike with nature and with the social law of the division of property. Still, much can be accomplished by the passage of a few years, by the growth of two or three seasons,—always provided that the plan be correct. That is the chief essential.

In this crude form the problem of house-building in the suburbs of our great cities—which should be the best possible places in which to live our common every-day lives—descends to an age on which culture, refinement and the light of newer, higher ideals are beginning to shine, as the resultants of national prosperity, power and progress.

The best architects and landscape gardeners are transferring their
attention from moldings of wood and stone to moldings of country hill-side and hedge-rows. It is a sign full of meaning that these gentlemen are willing to look up from their drawing-board, to glance at the landscape which is to form the background of their work, and this sign we welcome with delight.

The situation which I have outlined is one that deeply interests me, and in the hope to be of practical service, I present a suggestion for the treatment of fifteen acres as a site for thirty-five houses.

People of moderate means can not, let me repeat, reproduce Had- don Hall, or "build stately;" stateliness being impossible of attainment in the few acres at our disposal. But practical study of the problem indicates as the first step in solution that a roadway of ample width be cut through the property; space for turning being left at the end, and, if possible, more than one entrance being provided. Then follows the sub-division of the tract into lots of perhaps fifty feet frontage and two hundred feet in depth.

Again, recognition should be made of the variation of levels, and
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care taken to profit by natural undulations of the soil; hollows should be filled and asperities softened, and the whole scene be led to a climax through a vista of trees planted with due regard to exposure, size and aspect.
And here let me assert that I am not giving a description of a summer resort, of retreats in the mountains, or of villas by the sea. I am simply writing of the suburbs of great, thronging cities, which are near enough to catch the perfume of the country-side and yet not too remote to enjoy the advantages of the town.
Returning to my subject, I must again insist upon the importance of the road, which is secondary alone to the site itself. The road on the area which is under consideration should not be winding. Contrary to the general belief, it is the straight, wide, long road which lends dignity to the small area. Graceful sweeps and sinuous curves should be reserved for parks containing hundreds of acres.
In these homes,—and by homes I mean, not an area of fifty by two hundred feet enclosed by a hedge of privet, rhododendron, roses, or hemlock, but the friendly settlement of small houses on a green lawn—do we desire the reproduction of a Norman château, an Italian villa, or an English cottage? Certainly not. We desire a small building which shall be suited to our climate, our economics, our habits of life; which shall be distinctively American; based upon the good and practical portions of Old World country architecture, and showing well-known characteristics, but responding also to American inventiveness and sympathies, and the needs of daily life; finally, constructed of American materials treated in full American manner. Verandas and piazzas we must have. They need not be made a part of the house, to exclude the sun and create gloom. They may be placed at the end, the side, or away from the house, with a few feet of attachment. The treatment of the veranda is a strong point of difference between the small houses of the Old and those of the New Country. This one point has done more to win favor for American architecture than any feature of the Colonial houses of the Eastern and Middle States.

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But to return to the small houses to be built within the fifteen acre area, on the slope of a beautiful American hill-side, such as may be found in any State of the Union!

Our modern type house is a modification of an English cottage and is shown in two treatments. The first treatment has a stone gable of simple outline, with stone stringers and corbel table, and not high enough to spoil the long, low proportions which this double house presents when viewed in perspective. The little structure is not without character and distinction, if built of good, rough stone, undressed, and laid to show rubble side out, and with well-tooled joints; the joints being for the most part one inch thick and of soft white mortar. The second treatment offered is in timber and concrete instead of stone, all architectural features being preserved. The three mullioned window frames of chestnut, ash, or other hard wood, are of timber six inches square, solid, pinned, and finished in boiled oil; the casement windows being of iron, painted light green, and to open out.
The plan is American: a solution of the one room problem. The entrance door opens from a porch into a room spacious, airy and delightfully cool in summer; cosy and warm in winter. The fireplace is of stone, lined with brick and designed to burn “sticks” four feet long. The walls are lined two-thirds of their height with wood; while big beams showing adze marks cross the ceiling and rest upon stout posts springing from the floor. This last is of hard wood, not cut into narrow boards, but into those of varying widths, laid with wide joints of black cement or asphalt. A heavy iron lantern hangs in the middle of this room, and the pewter dishes on a broad buffet compete with a few Nankin plates, in a contest as to which shall best reflect the sunlight.

The remainder of the scheme needs no comment; as plans show rooms better than words can do. I may, perhaps, speak of the rear porch which can be converted into an *al fresco* dining room, and of a den in the second story, whose hearth bids welcome to the invalid or the student.
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Our house is small and unpretentious, dependent upon its surroundings for a portion of its charm, but challenging many larger dwellings which are deprived of a congenial landscape setting, and the soothing presence of a well-planted roadway. A property such as this can be secured at a cost not exceeding two hundred dollars the lot.

After all, the great point of difference between the house of the rich man and that of the poor—in this country at least—is environment. Let us therefore unite to rouse our friends to action, in order that we may do away with aloofness!
The sun shines for all. Trees and hedges will grow fir cones for the millionaires. The plan is the thing. Let us provide that it be right. All else will follow.