CONCERNING COTTAGES AND CONTENT: ALICE M. RATHBONE

Together with the rank growth of luxury in modern life, there flourishes the tonic herb simplicity. Only the resolve to secure a bit of this spreading root, on the part of natures in full accord with simplicity, would, at first thought, seem necessary to its possession; but it happens, unfortunately for many, that the simple life, in its highest sense, is always just out of reach, because of overmuch simplicity of income.

"To live content with small means" comes first, with much significance, in Channing’s beautiful “Symphony;” nevertheless, if peace and comfort are to dwell with us, a restful abiding place is needful; hence, this proposition: the small income, plus an inexpensive cottage, equals content. This is largely a woman’s problem, although there come to mind instances like that of the old sea-captain who drifted happily with his lovely wife into a pretty cottage on his son-in-law’s estate. There they rounded out their lives in their own way, with loving grandchildren close at hand to pet and spoil, while yet they were secure in the blessed quiet of their own fireside, when just to be together seemed the best possible of all fates.

It is, however, the middle-aged woman stranded in some forlorn hall-bedroom, or in, yet not of, the home of others, who would most welcome the dignity and content to be given by a home of her own, which might be shared by a relative or close friend in similar need.

Let us suppose this woman to be well-gifted with culture, domestic tastes and independent spirit; one who, although poorly endowed with this world’s goods, can go to
her dictionary, and read without dismay the true definition of cottage: knowing that, if it come within her very small means, the

“humble habitation” must be located where land is of low value,—probably in some quiet little village. Here is simplicity to test the soul.

If overburdened with bric-à-brac and fine clothes, the inhabitant of such a cottage would find herself miserably cramped; but the woman lightly laden with what she “knows to be useful or believes to be beautiful,” has room for development in the narrowest limits. As regards location, the woman of culture is too resourceful to find village life uninteresting, and the village has need of her powers and personality.

And so, seeing large possibilities in a small income and a cottage,—could one be found to fit the other,—our seeker for a modest roof-tree sets out upon her quest for a house-space as small as can be devised for the comfort of two persons; a house placed, with its little garden plot, amid pleasant surroundings, and obtainable for the very low rent on which her hope of a brighter life depends.

But there are cottages and cottages. If this pilgrim of hope follow the direction of the guide-post pointing cottageward, she may find herself before a Newport palace, and, from that extreme, down the descending scale of habitations, she will rarely come upon the object of her search: namely, the veritable cottage, which because humble, needs not to be wholly commonplace, since simplicity lends itself most kindly to artistic touches everywhere.

An interesting attempt to solve our proposed problem was made, a few years since, in England, by Miss Mary Campbell Smith, who made a business of renting detached or semi-detached cottages of four or five rooms, to gentlewomen of scanty means. Her capital being small, Miss Smith found it best, at first, merely to rent and improve laborers’ dwellings. These she furnished simply,
comfortably, on a very small income, in one of these compact little homes, which have proved a distinct success.

This would be a practical and beneficent experiment for the woman of large means to make, in our own country, in behalf of the woman of small means: both women holding to the cottage in its true sense; the one for the safety of her investment, the other for the safety of her peace of mind, to be assured by living within a fixed income, however small it might be.

More and more do we see two women of comfortable means joining forces to make one more pleasant home in the world, and if, by means of the cottage-of-the-low-rental, modest incomes could do the same, why, so much the better for the world!

An advantage of limited house space is that cares lessen; leaving hours of leisure for out-of-door life in sum-

mer, and for all the indoor pleasures of winter. Thus for women loving home, books and gardens, a life approaching the ideal might be led in a cottage, the home of content, which “is our best having.”

The spirit may open wings as wide as the firmament, in a cell as narrow as the human hand.

—Alfred de Musset

CERTAIN CRAFTSMAN COTTAGES

In conformity with numerous requests which have been recently received, The Craftsman presents a series of illustrations and plans of small cottages designed to afford a safe investment and a comfortable home to one or two persons of narrow means. The purposes governing the work have been to employ solid, econom-