EVERYBODY is a collector of one sort or another," said Ellen Terry one day in the easy familiarity of after-luncheon chat. "My hobby is to collect cottages. I have eight, I believe, scattered here and there in the sweet English country." Nothing about Miss Terry is more English than this penchant for little firesides. She has confessed that it was not very wise economically to hold on to the possession of so many that she never intended to occupy again; but she couldn’t wrest her heart from any one that she had given her affection to.

One who has seen Tower Cottage, Miss Terry’s fireside in Winchelsea, a rambling old structure shouldering itself up to the tower gate that stands as the main entrance from the Romney plain to this quaint old English town, will surely vow to spend a golden summer in this quiet retreat, where life may be lived on terms of beguiling friendship with many a remnant of the Middle Ages. Whatever the people of this city may say to an intruding and sentimental stranger, the kind old lady with the sturdy name of Mrs. Leadbeater, who keeps a tea shop a few doors away from the Tower Cottage, will have a welcoming word; and there, if the ruined “Friars” or the Crusaders’ tombs in the old Gothic church standing in the middle of the green, fail of all the craved for human intercourse, one may find pleasant discourse on all the homely matters of life.

Tower Cottage was too public a place, however for the famous actress who has been fed with adulation. The tourist would knock at the gate and demand an undue share of those hours that Miss Terry craves for quiet and rest; and so Winchelsea sees her no more. Not many miles away, but by an intricate roundabout railway journey stands her farmhouse in Small Hythe. It is a ridiculous enough little engine and train that bears you from the main line at Headcorn to Tenterden. Then you must provide your own conveyance or walk out to the little hamlet where Miss Terry has for a number of years found frequent intervals of seclusion from the life of London. It is here, as she told us on her last visit to America, that she wished to plant the golden daffodils with money earned by laborious journeying back and forth through this broad land, with pauses to open the wonders of her heart for the last time on her glorious Shakespearean heroines.

On your way out from Tenterden to Miss Terry’s farmhouse you are arrested by a little timbered cottage standing by a small Tudor church. It is one of the chaplet of firesides of which she speaks,
A ROSE COTTAGE IN KENT

one which she has conveyed to her daughter, Miss Edith Craig. The hand of time had lain heavily upon it when they came into possession; but they contended with the destroyer and now no more charming little nest for tired spirits exists in that part of the country.

Many were the headshakes of skeptical neighbors when Miss Craig came to take possession. Nothing could be done with such unpromising material. Hadn’t it served its purpose as a human habitation and earned its rest after several centuries of service? Besides the soil was clayey and would produce nothing, not even flowers. The answer to all this, after ten years, is a rose-embowered paradise. The month of June finds the cottage glowing with roses; rose vines clambering over the old walls, by the front porch and overrunning the arbors and trellises. Nor do they take their flight along with June.

THE plot of ground surrounding the cottage has been slowly developed into a garden of that quiet and restful type that lures to easy meditation. There are no formal lines such as a more stately house would demand, though the rustic pergola speaks of a compromise with aristocratic tradition. Its walks are bordered with shrubs and hardy perennials so timed that no season is without its profuse blossoms. The arbor stands with its back to the highway that runs past the house close upon the front of the cottage, and the easy seats placed there lead the eye beyond the immediate picture of garden landscape, across green English fields to the distant blue rim that tells of the presence of the sea. And it is this element of the landscape that brings to mind the romantic story that makes Miss Craig’s cottage a memorable landmark.

The little Tudor church with its walls covered with ivy stands so close as to make a curtain from the west and a background for that part of the garden. The edifice was built in the time of Henry the Seventh, as a place in which to say masses for the souls of drowned mariners who were washed ashore where the garden now glows with its seasonal color. Little by little, in the intervening years the sea has receded until now it is seventeen miles away, with the wide flats of the Romney marshes lying between. It is a pleasanter story than that which has put itself into verse to cling to the far more stately fane at Tenterden. “Tenterden Steeple is the cause of Godwin Sands.” That charge sounds enigmatic until one unravels the tale of the perfidious covetousness of no less a personage than the Bishop of Rochester, who built his steeple with the stone that was donated by the country to build the sea wall and so to keep
THE OLD BRICK FLOWER-BORDERED PATH TO
THE ENTRANCE OF TOWER COTTAGE: ONE
OF ELLEN TERRY'S "LITTLE FIRESIDES."

From a Photograph by Alice Boughton.
From a Photograph by Alice Boughton.

THE ROSE-COVERED ENTRANCE TO MISS CRAIG'S HOME, TOWER COTTAGE.
From a Photograph by Alice Boughton.

FLOWERS HIDE THE FOUNDATION OF TOWER COTTAGE, AND CLIMB OVER THE DOORWAY TO THE UPPER STORY.
From a Photograph by Alice Boughton.

THE ROSE ARBOR THROUGH WHICH YOU LOOK ACROSS GREEN ENGLISH FIELDS TO THE SEA.
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off the inundating waves that afterward broke in east of Deal and stopped up Sandwich Haven. The tale has furnished many writers with material, none more naïve than that told by Hugh Lattimer, who credits the saying to the oldest wiseacre of the village, whose logic ran this way: "I am an old man, sir, and I may remember the building of Tenterden Steeple, and I may remember when there was no steeple at all there. And before that Tenterden Steeple was in building, there was no manner of speaking of any flats or sands that stopped the haven; and therefore I think that Tenterden Steeple is the cause of the destroying and decay of Sandwich Haven."

Sitting in this old-world garden of peace and roses, protected from the showers that overtake you almost before the sun has had time to turn his back and enthralled by the liquid notes of the skylark, this logic is as comfortable as any bred of a more rational order of life. One turns one’s eyes comfortably down the long path of unevenly set brick on which great clumps of marguerites and asters encroach without hindrance to the old well with its overhung sweep—a kind of a social center for the kindred spirits that come at Miss Craig’s welcome. For the little cottage is usually taxed to its utmost to house those who gladly hear the call away from London. There is a frank simplification of life once one gets within the boundaries of this little home, symbolized by the smock frocks that are the favorite wearing apparel of whichever sex is biding the time. Of course, the intruding male is rare and he counts himself highly favored. Though one may fancy that in this secluded spot thought might reasonably stand still, or proceed as vagrantly as old Hugh Lattimer’s peasant’s reasoning, yet here in this fragrant garden you may hear the most ardent discussion of the suffrage cause, for the chatelaine has long been enrolled in the ranks of those who are fighting for the vote, or when this subject is not uppermost there is apt to be some problem connected with the future of the theater. Both Ellen Terry’s children are pioneers in the field of stage production, though one is apt to hear more of Mr. Gordon Craig’s theorizing than of the effective London theatrical productions of recent times staged by Miss Edith Craig.

A glance within the little house at once endears it to the visitor. The first impression is that the cottage was built around the chimney. That was the first consideration no doubt, for the size of this retreat as in most South county cottages, quite outruns all proportion. Seats for four are comfortably installed within its capacious mouth. Here in the most fascinating of inglenooks time slips speedily away. The decoration, too, of the rooms is in keeping with their unpretentious dignity. And old furniture is in harmony with the picturesque perfection of the little cottage.