HILLSIDE ARCHITECTURE: THE PICTURESQUE POSSIBILITIES OF A SLOPING SITE: BY G. H. AND E. D. FORD

ANY a "change of heart" has occurred during the last twenty-five years in regard to home-building, especially in the popular ideas as to the requirements of a site. Most of us can remember the time when the owner of an uneven piece of ground viewed it ruefully, and considered the expense of filling the ravines or leveling the knolls. He even counted upon the earth to be taken from the basement area to contribute toward this "evening-up" process. With much labor and expenditure, he removed every vestige of diversity, and brought his ground into conformity as nearly as possible with his neighbor's.

Today, however, the prospective home-builder shows you a piece of land, the condition of which appears to be the result of mining operations or an earthquake, and asks you if it isn't a beautiful site for the quaint cottage he is going to build. With much enthusiasm he explains that he will place the building on the hillside, so that the trees and shrubs breaking the skyline of the crest may be enjoyed from the rear windows. And he has thought of a summer-house (which he may build himself) silhouetted against the sky at the highest point. At the bottom of the ravine, he adds, ferns and other moisture-loving plants can be made to flourish, and the path leading there may wind around the undulations to give distance and variety. He gives himself no anxiety about the placing of his house, for he knows that, to the resourceful architect, the seeming difficulties will only prove opportunities for original and interesting design. And if you have been fortunate enough to break away from the old conventional traditions, and prefer picturesque irregularity to symmetrical primness, you will agree with him that the spot is full of inspiration for both house and grounds.

In The Craftsman of May, nineteen thirteen, appeared an illustrated article describing a cottage which we designed in conformance with the irregularities of its site. It was planned for a lot in which the highest level adjoined the street, and which sloped considerably toward the rear. The house here presented is intended to meet a similar need, where the conditions are, however, reversed, the slope in this instance being toward the front or street side. Especially is it adapted to hillside construction where its contour would merge into that of the hill. Indeed, the more irregular its environment, the more at home this house would seem.

From the street approach, the façade shows two stories and attic, yet the low, substantial effect is retained by the breadth
of basement which is entirely above ground—also by the long roof lines which encompass the upper rooms. The main feature is the broad gable, accentuated by the triangular, two-story bay, flanked on one side by the tall stone chimney, on the other by the stone-columned entrance. The projection of the building beyond the main roof at the left is balanced on the right by the high balustrade of the porch steps. Plaster is used as exterior finish, with a suggestion of paneling in the gables.

The entrance is recessed and the front door opens into a shallow vestibule. However, the broad, short flight of steps opposite, with its extended vista, contributes an appearance of spaciousness. These steps lead to the main hall on the first floor, four and a half feet above the level of the vestibule.

The arrangement of the basement presupposes a site with considerable forward slope, the garage and billiard room being above ground. The billiard or playroom has a large fireplace, the chimney of which is included in the principal chimney-stack. The stationary table and seat would be found convenient for games, various kinds of work, and for the informal serving of refreshments.

From the vestibule, a short flight of steps at the right of the main stairs leads down to this room. At the left of the main stairs are steps to the passage from which the garage and furnace room are reached. From the pantry, the cellar stairs give direct access to the furnace room and laundry.

To its peculiar situation in the center of the house, the main
hall owes much of its quaint charm. The opening at the wider end gives entrance into the living room. Above the stairs is an opening, protected by a balustrade, through which one catches an enticing view of a cozy den, reached by a short flight of steps from the hall. Glazed folding doors shut away the stairs to the upper story, the door of the coat room cuts off the undesirable projection of the corner, and the short corridor is lighted by a panel of semi-opaque glass in the bathroom door at the end. It is a simple arrangement, yet with pleasing effect, as the illustration shows.

FROM the entrance into the long living room one has a pleasant impression of its salient features. The projecting window, considerably above the ground level, gives a fairly high outlook in two directions, while close by is the “library corner,” with fireplace and long seat, the bookcase at each end within reach of the hand. Glazed doors opening upon the screened porch offer a more or less extended view because of the elevation, and through the dining room windows one has a vista of the hillside garden, since the rise of the ground at the rear lifts it into the plane of vision. In the living room the proportion of wall spaces for pictures and the disposal of furniture has been carefully considered from the standpoint of convenience and harmonious grouping.

It will be observed that the screened porch, on the level of the living room, is several feet above the ground level at the front, its
staircase parapet being a feature of the front elevation. This position gives a breadth and novelty of outlook, as well as a privacy which the ground-floor porch too often lacks.

The den is directly above the vestibule and lower part of the main stairs. In the opening overlooking the hall, doors of decorative glass might be placed if deemed necessary. The opening between the den and the living room has casement sash with colored or opaque glass, which, even when closed, would be an attractive feature, and when open would give distinctive charm to each apartment. The clustered windows at the front and the ease with which the den could be rendered private, make it an ideal rest room or study.

With the owner’s bedroom on the first floor, the bath adjacent, and the kitchen across the hall, the arrangement is very convenient for the mistress who is her own housekeeper. At the same time, the stairs leading from the kitchen to the chamber floor give a maid direct access from her room to the service portion of the house. On the chamber floor there are three bedrooms and two sleeping porches. The maid’s room is above the den, with an outlook over the front lawn.

An examination of the basement plan shows how little the enclosing walls of the building deviate from the simplest form, yet the exterior gives no suggestion of the ordinary square structure. The extensions on each side, while contributing to comfort and convenience within, give the roof its long lines and attractive variation. The compactness of the building, attained without sacrifice of interior or exterior proportion, is an important quality where expense of construction has to be considered.