

GROOMBRIDGE PLACE, KENT.

GROOMBRIDGE PLACE, that beautiful and attractive Kentish house, remarkable alike in historical interests, the radiant beauty of its gardens, and the variety of its internal features, is situated near Tunbridge Wells, close to the Sussex border. We shall traverse very briefly the fruitful field of its history, which, however, we cannot neglect, because the associations of the house should add a great deal to the interest of the pictures illustrating its interior.

We must know something of the men who dwelt therein. After passing through the hands of the powerful families of Cobham and Clinton, Groombridge passed by sale to the Wallers of Lamberhurst, who were a race of great renown in Kent and Sussex, and the buttressed walls of the garden belong to their time, as does some of

the oak panelling. The most famous member of this old Kentish family was that Sir Richard who fought so valiantly at Agincourt, and there took prisoner the Duke of Orleans, whom he held captive for more than twenty years at Groombridge. Waller was a man of high credit, who afterwards served under the Duke of Bedford, and had custody of the Count of Angoulême, Orleans' brother, in 1437. Fresh interest was thus added to Groombridge, and the memory of those transactions is preserved about the house, where the fleur de lys of France may be observed, and has been added as an adornment to the garden gates. Waller rose higher and higher in the Royal estimation, and, having acted prominently against Jack Cade, was made receiver of the Royal Castles and manors in Kent, Surrey, Sussex, and Hants.



GROOMBRIDGE PLACE.



THE DRAWING-ROOM.

From this good soldier descended the Wallers of Southampton and Beaconsfield.

Sir Thomas Waller, Lieutenant of Dover Castle in the time of James I., was the last of the Groombridge Wallers. He alienated the estate to Thomas Sackville, Earl of Dorset, Lord Treasurer, and it afterwards passed by sale, apparently in the reign of James I., to John Packer, Esq., Clerk of the Privy Seal, who re-erected the chapel at Groombridge in gratitude for Prince Charles's return from Spain. His son Philip was the builder of the present

house at Groombridge, and it grew under his hands into the quaint and pleasing edifice which remains, called by Evelyn, its owner's friend, "a modern Italian villa." The ancient moat was spanned by bridges, and the loggia, or porch, with its Ionic pillars, pediment, and balustrade, adds to the beautiful old structure something of the taste of Italy. Mr. Philip Packer, indeed, produced a mansion of rather original character, and we must commend the judgment he displayed. He built upon a site which John Evelyn did not approve, but

Evelyn's host was not to be drawn away from the old location within the moat. He preserved what he could that was old, and the panelling in the study undoubtedly came from the earlier house. It will be seen that it bears the old English linen pattern, which belongs to mediæval times, but continued in use until late in the sixteenth century, and to that century we ascribe the older panelling at Groombridge. The work is extremely interesting, because it bears the marks of changing style. The fireplace arch is of Tudor character, and the same lines are introduced into the

carving above, but the craftsman had imbibed the classic spirit, and the fluted pilasters, the scrollwork adornment in the horizontal panels, and the Renaissance carving in the cornice are all in the later taste; to the lover of handicraft this combination of styles in the work at old Groombridge will be very interesting. It will be noticed that the fireback belongs to the late sixteenth century, and that, like the firedogs, it bears the fleur de lys in memory of the association of Groombridge with the Royal captives of France.

It has been asserted that Evelyn, returning



THE STUDY.



THE HALL CHAMBER.

from Italy, endeavoured to induce Mr. Philip Packer to rebuild Groombridge upon classic models; but if that be the case, he seems, fortunately, not to have succeeded, for there is very little that is purely classic in the house except the loggia porch. Mr. Packer was buried in Groombridge Chapel, and was followed in possession by his son John and his grandson Philip. Upon the death of the latter unmarried, the estate passed to his sisters as co-heiresses, and was purchased out of the Court of Chancery by Mr. William Camfield, who in 1792 sold it to Mr. Robert Burgess of Hall Place, in the county of Kent. In due course it came to his nephew, the Reverend John J. Saint, and to the Misses Saint, who are its present possessors.

The house which Mr. Packer built appears to have changed comparatively little since his time. Its internal features are good and simple, and present that domestic aspect which should be found in all houses that do not partake of the character of palaces. The hall-chamber is panelled with oak, having a design distempered upon it, and contains an old carved buffet, and excellent Jacobean and Chippendale chairs. There is no intrusion of the twentieth century here. The lighting is by candles, and a chandelier hangs by a chain from the ceiling. The

dining-hall bears the same character, and has all those delights and comforts which belong to ancient oak, invested with the warm hues of time, and reflecting from the dull polish of its surface the bright sunlight through the window or the flames of the log fire on the hearth. A Jacobean mantel, with enriched piers and elaborate panelling, rises almost to the ceiling, and the fireplace below has an arch quite in the Tudor character. The wainscot also rises to the ceiling, and forms a suitable background for the old family portraits that hang upon it. An ancient table, thick-legged and sturdy, with foot-rails in the olden fashion, a richly-carved sideboard cabinet, and Chippendale or Sheraton chairs, sconces upon the walls, and the crystal chandelier, add to the harmonies of a charming interior.

There are lighter features in the drawing-room, where the work is of more recent date. Let it be noticed how the panelling of this charming apartment, which may belong to the time of the Stuarts, differs from the more ancient panelling of the dining-hall. The ceiling is moulded in harmony with this later style, and is peculiarly enriched in its plaster-work, which represents fruit and foliage. There are grand old mirrors in the room, Chippendale chairs, others of older type, portraits of the

Packers, and an especially beautiful old crystal chandelier.

What we have so far noticed in this fine old Kentish house differs entirely from the carving in the study to which allusion has been made. We may thus observe the influence of successive tastes, and the characteristics of various times, all marking something of individuality in the possessors. The linen pattern would have been an impossible adornment for a house built by Mr. Philip Packer. Obviously this oaken vesture of the study is considerably earlier, and it must therefore have been retained when the mediæval structure, renovated by Sir Richard Waller, having fallen into some decay, was

replaced. Everyone privileged to visit Groombridge has been impressed with its beautiful and interesting character, and it is referred to in all published accounts of the place. We shall not describe it further, because it is seen well in one of the pictures, and we shall be content once again to draw attention to the very interesting contrast and union of styles which it presents. It is gratifying that so characteristic and notable a mansion should be so jealously preserved, and should be maintained within and without in the state of perfection in which it is depicted, with the memories and tastes of the centuries in its chambers.



THE DINING-ROOM.