

CASTLE ASHBY, NORTHAMPTON.

AMONG the great seats of middle England this noble domain ranks with those that are pre-eminent, standing in a lovely region of England aloft upon a hill, and being in this respect unlike most old

Northamptonshire houses, whose builders sought the safety of the moat in the hollow. A more ancient house stood upon the site, "crenellated" by licence in 1306, by Walter de Langton, Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield. It passed

with his sister, Alice, to her husband, Robert Peveril, in 1315, and, after being in dispute, came successively to Sir William de la Pole and to Edward Grey, created Earl of Kent in 1465. It was afterwards sold to the ancestor of its present owner, Sir William Compton, a courtier standing high in the friendship and favour of Henry VIII., who had great personal regard for him, and took him into his intimacy. The knight accompanied the King when he rode into the lists at a tournament in Richmond Park, and the skill and gallantry of Henry and his companion attracted general admiration. Compton was, by accident, dangerously injured, but afterwards many times distinguished himself, and showed his prowess in the lists and the field. His grandson, Sir Henry Compton, created Baron Compton in 1572, was the builder of Castle Ashby, to which additions were made, and in which improvements were effected, by his successors.

The house was raised at a time when English noblemen and gentlemen were rivalling one another in the splendour and extent of their dwelling-places. The Elizabethan house of Lord Compton consisted of a centre with two projecting wings in a manner common to the time. The quadrangular form came later, when Inigo Jones connected the two wings on



THE FOOT OF THE STAIRWAY.

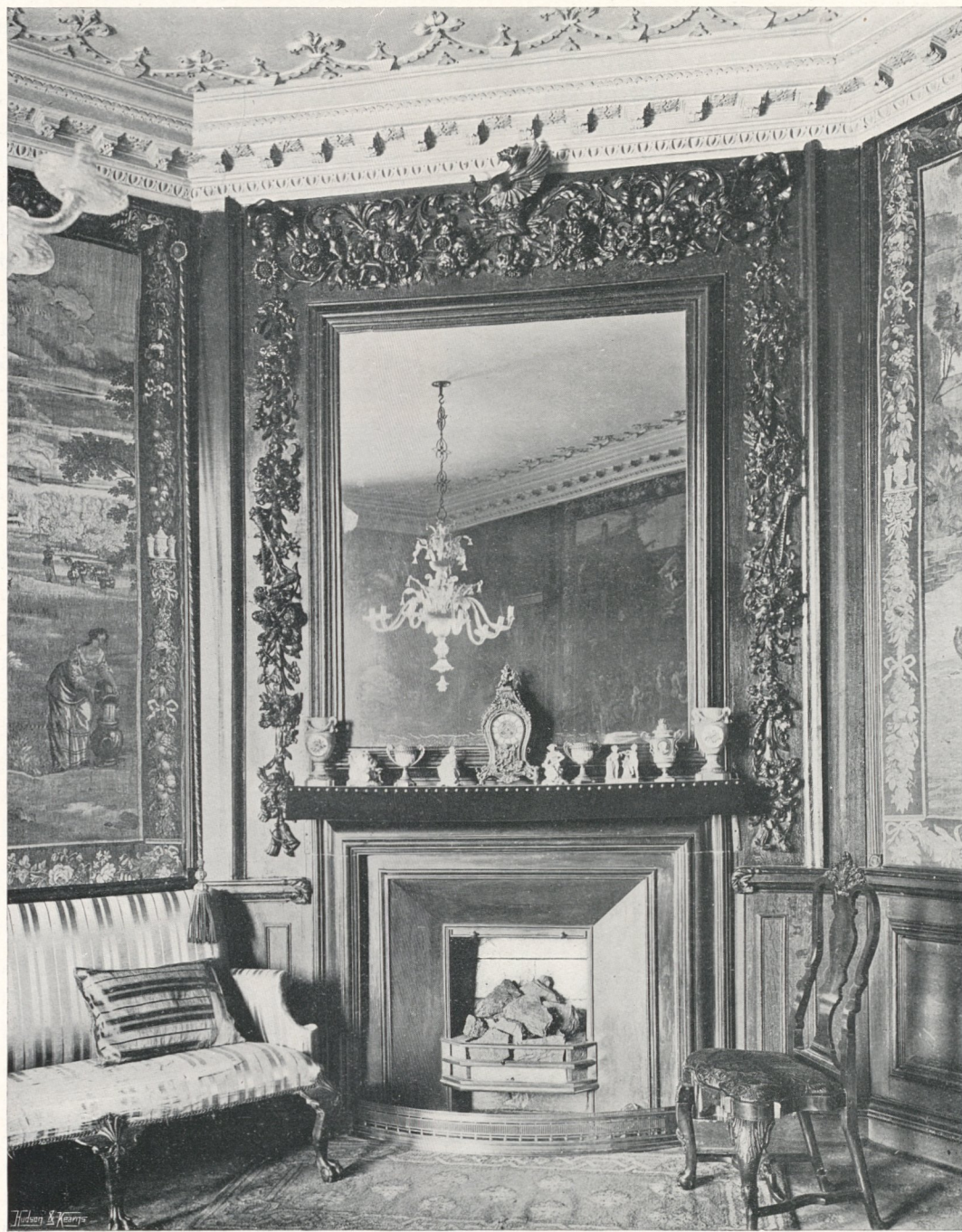
the south with cloisters, and the Long Gallery above. Jones was also employed upon the east side, and is said to have been interrupted by the events of the Civil War, in which he took a part. His hand is upon the place, and the structure is quite characteristic of his style and skill. There is picturesqueness, indeed, from whichever side we regard the house. Its projecting bays and mullioned windows in the older portion are contrasted with the classic features of the later additions, and there is great variety and picturesqueness owing to the use of a perforated

wealthy Alderman of London, who had a great house at Canonbury. There is a noble fireplace in the Drawing Room (called "King William's Room"), brought from Canonbury Tower, which was the entrance to Sir John Spencer's country house.

It may here be permissible to say as much as is necessary concerning the noble family of Compton. Spencer Compton, second Earl of Northampton, was a great favourite with Charles I. and a notable cavalier, killed on the Royal side at the battle of Hopton Heath, March 19th, 1643, and James, the third Earl, paid a heavy composition for his estates. Spencer, the eighth Earl, who wasted his property, lost very heavily in what was known as the "spendthrift election" for the borough of Northampton in 1768, and it appears to have been due to this circumstance that Castle Ashby was denuded of many things that had beautified it.

Mr. Robinson, in his "*Vitruvius Britannicus*," said that in his time it had "little internal beauty," the ceilings, especially in the Drawing Room and the old Library, being the principal attraction. The Great Hall had been modernised, and a plain plaster ceiling filled the space occupied with striking effect by the original roof. It appears, however, that the roof had fallen in, that temporary repairs were effected, and that the late Marquess completely restored the apartment. We are thus able to measure the great work of regeneration which must have been done to make Castle Ashby the beautiful place that it is now.

In the plan of the house the Great Hall and Staircase are on the north side, with the Drawing Room at the north-east corner, while on the east and west sides are the smaller living rooms and bed-chambers, the Long Gallery and Chapel, as well as a chamber which is known as "Queen Elizabeth's Bedroom," being on the south side. The Great Hall is 65ft. by 28ft., the Drawing Room 51ft. 6in. by 24ft., and the Long Gallery 91ft. by 15ft. 6in. The Hall, now happily restored, is a very noble and imposing chamber with beautiful enriched panelling, a screen at one end with an organ gallery over it, and a



THE TAPESTRY ROOM.

crested, with sentences to be read against the skyline, adding much to the originality and charm of the structure. The Psalmist's words, "Nisi Dominus ædificaverit domum" are used, and elsewhere, as one goes in or out, is seen the pious greeting or speeding, "Dominus custodiat introitum" (or "exitum") "tuum." In more recent additions such phrases are repeated.

Much was done to beautify Castle Ashby by the son of the builder, William, Lord Compton, afterwards Earl of Northampton, who married the daughter of Sir John Spencer, a



THE LONG GALLERY.



THE STAIRWAY.

gallery at the other with a staircase leading to the upper apartments. The fluted Corinthian pilasters, the arched panelling, and the other features are all very beautiful. The chimney-piece, which came from Canonbury Tower, is most elaborately carved with allegorical figures and heraldic designs, and is very noteworthy, and an admirable example of craftsmanship. The panelled roof, with its supporting corbels and brackets, is also extremely fine. All the work is good, but, save the chimney-piece, it is modern. Here are several fine pictures,

including the eighth Earl of Northampton, hero of the "spendthrift election," with his Countess, and son and daughter, by West. The furniture is also of rare beauty, and includes some excellent Italian chairs and other choice objects.

Most remarkable of all is the great Drawing Room, which is a particularly beautiful and light-some apartment. Here the fourth Earl entertained King William III. in 1695. The chimney-piece, as we have said, was brought from Sir John Spencer's house at Canonbury, and is a most beautiful example of the wood-carving of

Elizabeth's reign. The four strapwork panels with armorial centres and devices are separated and enclosed by elaborate niches, in which are figures of Prudence, Justice with the scales, Temperance, Faith, Hope, and Charity. The ceiling here is a wonderful example of the craftsmanship of the day. It has an elaborate coving with arms and devices, and very deeply-moulded panelling, every space characteristically adorned, and few finer pieces of this kind of work can be found anywhere. The room has also some extremely interesting pictures. The portrait

of Spencer Compton, the second Earl, who was killed at Hopton Heath, by Janssen, is a noble work. There is also a portrait of the first lord, who was a peer at the trial of Mary Queen of Scots in 1586. Another remarkable canvas represents the Duke of Buckingham after his murder, and has been attributed to Van Dyck. There are likewise very early pictures, of great note, of Sir John Talbot, first Earl of Shrewsbury, who was killed at Châtillon at the age of eighty, with his son, in 1453, and of Margaret Beauchamp, Countess of Shrewsbury, Sir John's wife,



THE HALL.



THE DRAWING-ROOM.



THE HALL AND GALLERY—EAST END.

1468. These portraits are amongst the earliest in the country. Our illustrations will show how very charming is the aspect of this noble room, with its two bay windows, its richly-

own. The supporting pillars represent the trunks of trees intertwined with ivy and other clinging growths, while the handrail, probably of the time of Queen Anne, has most elaborate



THE CHIMNEY-PIECE IN THE DRAWING-ROOM.

hued walls, its fine portraits, and its old and beautiful furniture, dating from many different periods.

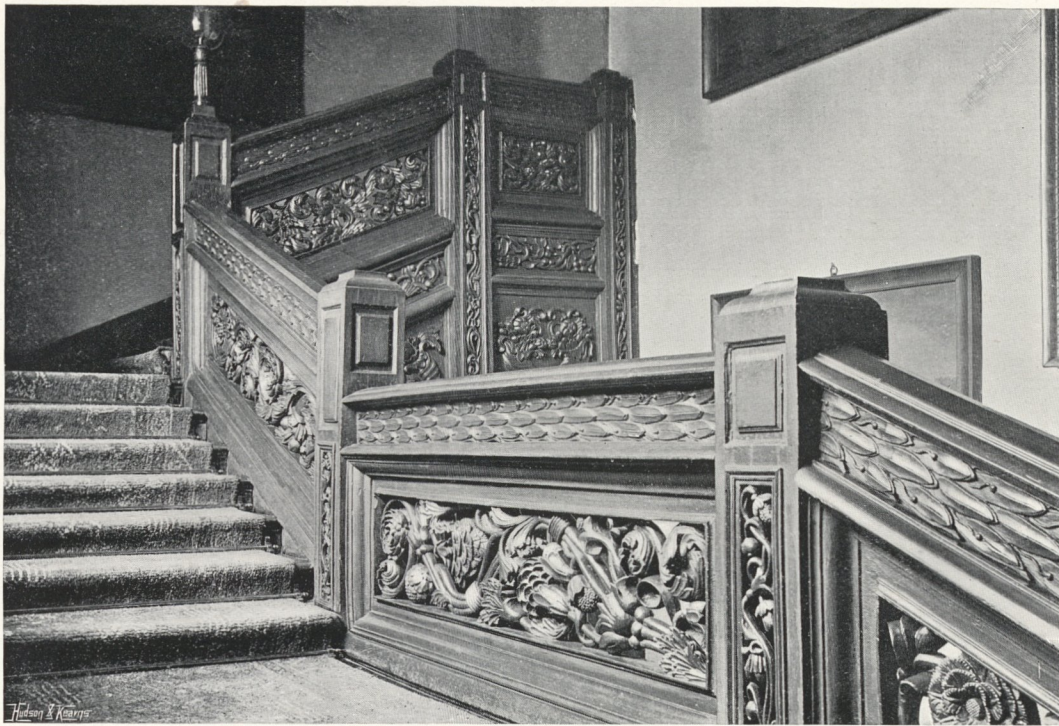
The great Staircase has a character all its

panels boldly carved in flowing patterns. All the work here is extremely rich, of very unusual character, and its charm will not escape anyone. Upon the walls hang several fine

portraits, including Bishop Compton and the third Earl. The beautiful old staircase of the time of the building of the house is on the west side. Several of the rooms are lined with fine tapestry, mostly of Dutch origin, representing scenes of the Deluge and a wedding and rustic gaieties. The State Bedroom has rich and peculiar needlework, and some pieces of fine Italian tapestry.

The Long Gallery on the south side of the quadrangle, which was built by Inigo Jones, belongs, in its features, to a later date than other parts of the structure. The late Marquess divided it into three compartments by richly elaborated transverse beams, supported by fluted Corinthian columns in couples, each compartment

of the ceiling being beautifully adorned, and the mouldings and panellings in the plaster are both rich and effective. Here the influence of more modern tastes will be noted, and it will be seen that the style of furniture accords with that of the noble chamber, which has little, save its proportions and purpose, in common with the long gallery of Elizabethan and earlier times. Indeed, in its character it is purely classic, and it adds no little to the attractive aspect of the interior of Castle Ashby. The place has long since lighted upon good and seemly days, and has fallen into the hands of those to whom it has been a pleasure and a duty to adorn it, as befitted the ancient ancestral mansion of the great house of Compton, Marquesses of Northampton.



THE UPPER STAIRWAY.