

GODINTON, KENT.

THE interiors of the ancient house at Godinton, or Godington, in Kent, have a sumptuous richness which will impress everyone. We may go far, indeed, before we discover such a wealth of carving and adornment elsewhere, and even in a shire which includes such places as Penshurst and Knole, Surrenden Dering and Leeds Castle, Godinton House stands forth as in many ways remarkable. It has been possessed by those who have loved it, and have therefore adorned it, and the exceeding richness of its craftsmanship, the positive incrustation of beauties, is partly explained by the fact that a former possessor was a great collector of ancient carved

woodwork. In our pictures what is shown belonged mostly to Godinton originally, but here and there the discerning eye may detect an alien feature. Purists may, perhaps, raise an objection to the intermingling of the work of different periods collected from various places; but let us not undervalue zeal and the love of old things when we witness so plentiful a lack of that spirit everywhere throughout the land.

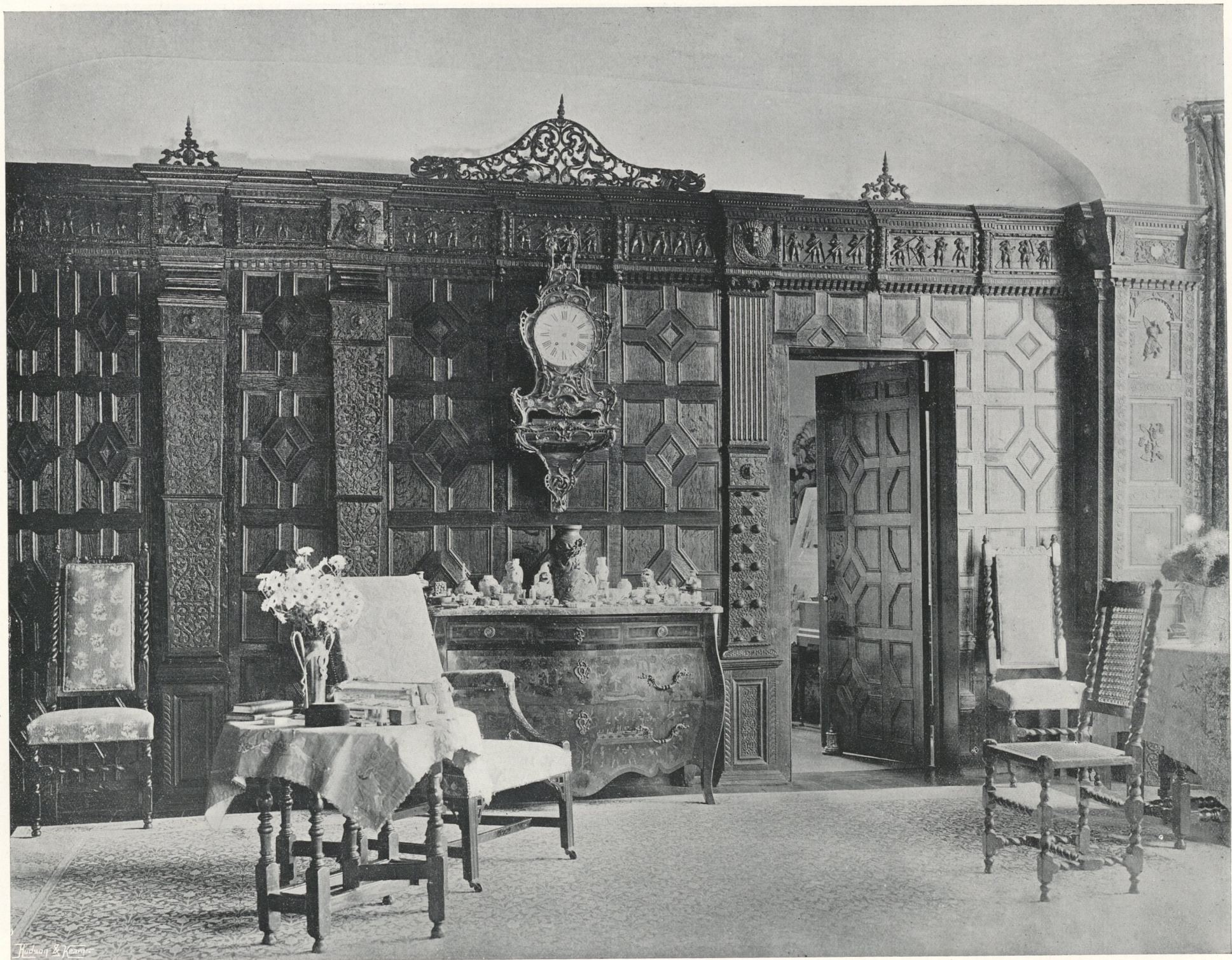
Godinton is an ancient place in the southwestern part of the parish of Great Chart, and lies upon the north bank of the river Stour, about two miles north-west of Ashford. Architecturally the existing house belongs mostly to



THE CHINA ROOM.



THE NORTH END OF THE LIBRARY.



THE NORTH END OF THE DRAWING-ROOM.

Stuart times, and, generally speaking, the internal fittings conform to that period. Through a marriage with a daughter of the family of Goldwell of Godinton the place passed to Thomas Toke of Bere Court, and by the Tokes the old house was built and adorned.

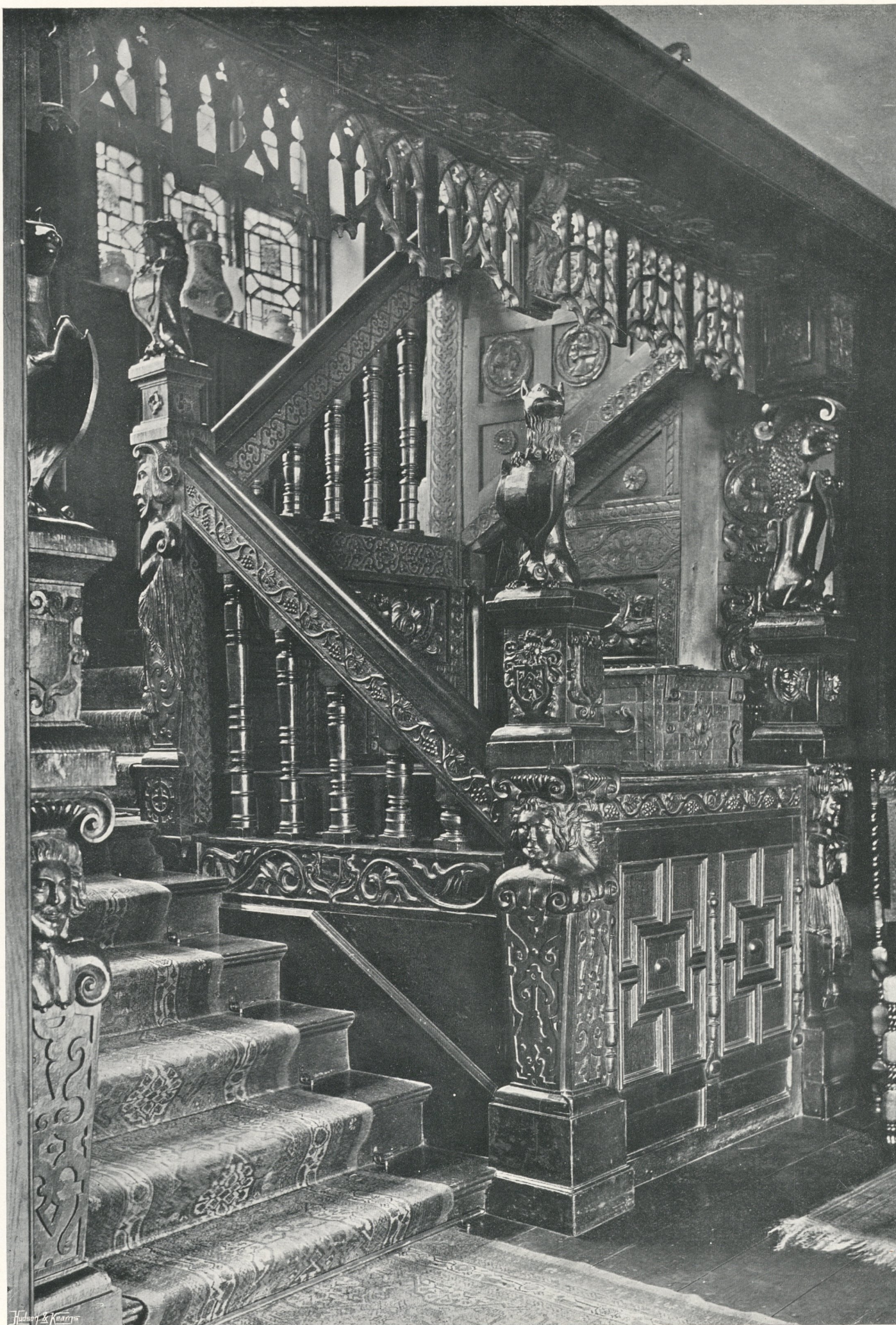
Toke of Godinton, great-grandson of this John Toke, was Sheriff of Kent in 1663, and lived until 1680, when he died at the age of ninety-three. He is buried in the chancel of the church with his five wives, the last of whom was Lady Diana, fourth daughter of Thomas



THE GREAT HALL.

John Toke of Godinton died in 1513, and was succeeded by his son, another John, who died at the age of eighty in 1565. The wife of the latter was a daughter of Sir Thomas Kempe of Ollantigh, and some objects from that place were brought to Godinton. Captain Nicholas

Earl of Winchilsea. A local tradition avers that, at the age of ninety-two or ninety-three, this redoubtable veteran, having lost Lady Diana, walked all the way from Godinton to London in quest of a successor. Fate, however, was against him, and he was taken ill and died.



THE CARVED STAIRWAY, 1628.

His estate passed to his nephew and heir-at-law, Nicholas Toke of Wye, son of his next brother, Henry Toke, M.D., for the old captain had left only daughters.

county at Godinton in 1693, and was knighted in the following year. We shall pass rapidly over the succeeding members of the family. Nicholas's son John was twice member for East



THE UPPER STAIRWAY.

It would appear that the new possessor did much to adorn the house, for his initials are over the mantel at the north end of the gallery, and there are indications in other parts of the house. He kept the shrievalty for the

Grinstead. Then came another Nicholas, who died in 1757, and was succeeded by John Toke of Godinton, who was living there in the early part of the last century. His son, Mr. Nicholas Roundell Toke, who married the daughter of

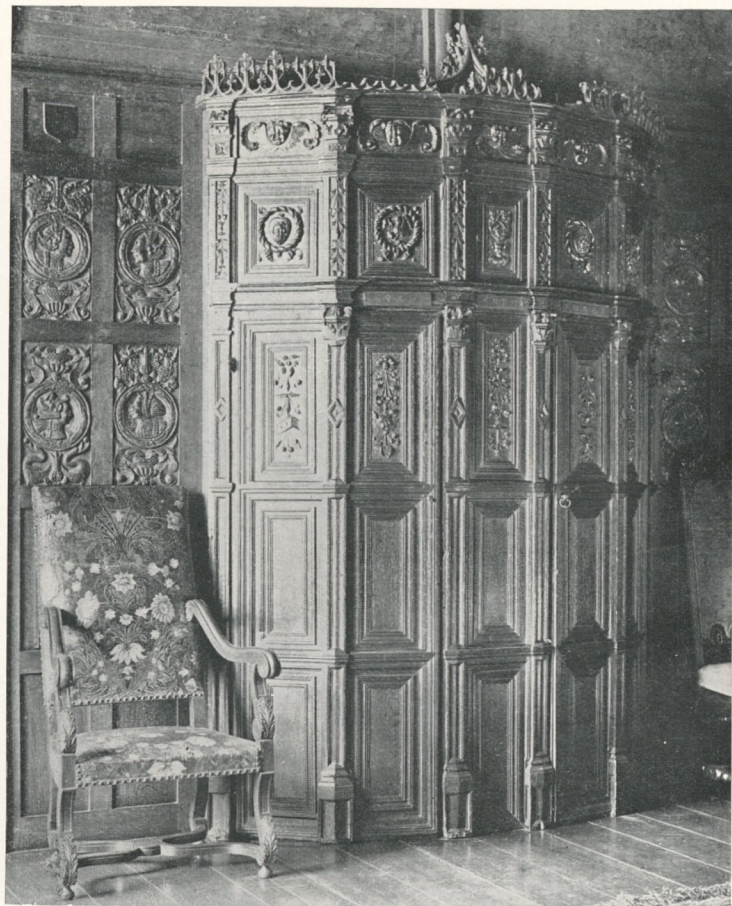


THE SOUTH END OF THE DRAWING-ROOM.

Sir Bouchier Wrey of Tawstock, Devon, worked much at the house, removing some disfigurements, and adding much to the richness of the place. He was succeeded at Godinton by his brother, the Rev. William Toke, rector of Barnston, Essex. The estate passed from the line of its old possessors in 1895, when it was sold to the present owner, Mr. G. Ashley Dodd.

The old structure of Godinton has its modest beauties, and presents the features of various times. Its eastern front is old, and there is more modern work on the north. The porch, the projecting wing, the mullioned windows, and the curved gable front, present the general aspect of the Stuart house, and the exterior and interior correspond in style and feeling. The present owner has carefully restored the house, with the advice of Mr. Reginald Blomfield, the eminent architect.

The Great Hall is a very noble apartment, most sumptuously finished and adorned. Its great tie-beam, which is seen supporting the kingpost and roof, is worthy of note, being finely moulded, and because the wood is chestnut. Here it may be observed that the chestnuts in the park are of noble size and great magnificence. Anciently the wood was not much used for construction. The panelling in the hall as elsewhere is very richly carved, and there is a beautiful open screen between the hall and the lobby. The same richness characterises the adornments of the mantel-piece, which we think were not all originally in this position. The effect, however, is harmonious and good. The arched doorways, the excellent details of cornices and structural and ornamental work, make this room particularly



CARVING IN THE HALL.

or all, of modern origin, from the excellent hand of Willement, it is interesting as giving the various shields of the Tokes and their connections.

The seventeenth century stairway, a good deal restored, is even more elaborate in its carvings than the hall, and the effect is of great richness and beauty. The newel-posts are carved from base to summit with arabesques, grotesques, and armorial achievements, and support heraldic birds and animals, with shields. The balustrade is of excellent turned oak, and the handrail is adorned with the twisted vine pattern. So we ascend to the gallery, finding everywhere things of interest or beauty. Let us not quarrel with the juxtaposition of Renaissance panelling and fourteenth century tracery. In the windows have been collected many shields of arms with the quarterings and matches of the family, which were formerly distributed throughout the house, and in the glass are several badges of the Kempes, brought from Ollantigh.



THE PRIEST'S ROOM.

interesting, and invest it with much individuality and charm. It may be observed that, though structurally the hall is old, many of its features belong to recent times. The armorial glass is noteworthy, and, though it appears to be mostly,

The Drawing Room is another grand apartment, panelled with square and diagonal wainscoting from floor to ceiling. The panelling is divided by pilasters, some fluted and some richly carved. Round the cornice is a peculiarly interesting and most unusual representation of the old

exercises of the militia, showing them with their matchlocks and rests engaged in drill. Nowhere else in England is there anything so curious of the kind. In other parts of the frieze are hunting scenes, while some of the panels are filled with characteristic Renaissance carving. A cabinet of Louis XVI. and a fine clock of the same period have their places with earlier furniture. The chimney-piece is of Bethersden marble, as is the case with some other chimney-pieces in the house.

The fireplace at the north end of the gallery, framed between book-shelves, is particularly rich, and bears the date 1671, with the initials of Nicholas Toke and his wife. The very unusual panels are divided by coupled Corinthian columns, and above in the cornice, which is most richly worked, are the Toke arms and the "Pelican in her Piety"—the desert bird,

"Whose beak unlocks her bosom's stream
To still her famished nestlings' scream."

The one thing which the lover of perfection in old houses may miss at Godinton is adornment of the ceilings, but a fine modern one is in the "White Parlour."

The same character of richness is found elsewhere in this most remarkable house. The features of the China Room are new, and were designed by Mr. Blomfield in 1896. In the Priest's Room we discover the older character, but it appears that nothing here belongs to the

ancient house. There is something of composite character in the mantel-piece, but it is all very charming. One of our illustrations shows in greater detail a very characteristic work. It is the overmantel in the Library, which has a central arched compartment, two flanking arches, with carved heads in the panels, and four figures supporting an architrave, with panels and dentils. It is a very curious and interesting composition, and is quite indicative of much of the work at Godinton.

The place is surrounded by very beautiful and attractive gardens. They are not the old gardens, it is true, but are of good character, and have been much improved of late. The trees are now of surprising size, and show the great fertility of the soil, and there is a good piece of water in the grounds. All these external features of pleasant surroundings and architectural merit should be linked with the unusual character of the interiors. Built by the Tokes, the existing house remained for hundreds of years in the same family, and was passed from father to son, each new possessor doing something according to his taste and the style of his time in his endeavour to add to the beauty of the place. In judicious hands some excrescences have been removed, and now Godinton is noteworthy as a place which has not only escaped destruction and decay, but has found those who have had a real pleasure in adding to its adornments.