

LONGLEAT, WILTSHIRE.

WHETHER Sir John Thynne, the Shropshire squire, knighted after the battle of Pinkie, 1547, afterwards secretary to the Protector Somerset, and the possessor of vast wealth in a time when much wealth ran in new channels, was veritably in his own person that mysterious architect John of Padua, as some have ventured to suggest, or whether he confided the erection of his famous dwelling to some other great master, or shared in the planning and designing, as is more probable, it is universally admitted that the house he built at Longleat is one of the most magnificent of all English ancient homes, comparable even to such places as Hatfield and

Audley End. Much might be said of its history, but the purpose here is mainly to note its internal features, and to endeavour to observe how Architecture, calling in Sculpture as a hand-maid, has singularly beautified it, and how the woodcarver, glass-stainer, tapestry-worker, and others carried on the house to completion, with rare, harmonious, and satisfactory charm. The erectors of Longleat were, indeed, many of them remarkable men. The original builder, Sir John Thynne, who secured possession of the lands of the old Black Augustinian Canons of Longleat, expended enormous sums during a period of years. His first structure suffered from fire, but beginning his work afresh about

1568, he is said to have been helped by Robert Smithson, the builder of Wollaton, and when he died in 1580 he left a large part of it completed, though much of it as an architectural shell merely, and no portion of the west front had been erected. The magnificent oak screen and wainscot were added by his son, Sir John Thynne. Sir James, the fourth owner, who died in 1670, erected the great staircase, and laid out the stone terrace under the advice of Sir Christopher Wren, and at the same time the old priory barn was converted into stabling. Thynne was visited at Longleat by Charles II. and his Queen in 1663, and great rejoicings took place. He was succeeded by his nephew Thomas, better known as "Tom of Ten Thousand," the "Issachar" of "Absolom and Achitophel," who was foully done to death in Pall Mall by the secret agents of Count Königsmark on February 12th, 1682. It is known that this possessor did much to beautify the place, completing a fine



MARBLE CHIMNEY-PIECE IN THE SALOON.

dining-room and making a new approach from Frome.

The murdered man's second cousin and successor, the first Viscount Weymouth, gave the external attractions, by laying out the gardens, and his hand is traceable also in the interior. Thenceforward, for some forty years, Longleat was without a resident owner. The third Viscount did much to improve the house, however, and kept great state there, but it was the second Marquess of Bath, about the year 1808, who carried out the most important alterations. He employed as his architect Wyatt,

better known as Sir Jeffrey Wyattville—the same who added a wing to Chatsworth—and the grand staircase and galleries took the character they now possess.

Thus we see how in successive hands Longleat became what it is, the fruit of a fine original conception, now lifting against the sky its venerable walls of mossy stone, pierced by a vast number of windows, adorned with pilasters and cornices, and crested with turrets and statues, and beautiful within through the admirable craftsmanship of many hands. Longleat is, in fact, as Mr. Fergusson said, one of the



THE GREAT HALL.



THE SCREEN AND GALLERY OF THE HALL.

largest and most beautiful palaces of its time in England.

Upon entering the house the visitor is impressed by the splendid character of the Great Hall, with its grand oaken roof, its magnificent carved screen and gallery, and its sculptured mantel-piece. Surmounting the screen, of which the enriched details are well seen in the picture, are the arms of the Protector Somerset in the middle, of Thomas Ratcliffe, Earl of Sussex, and of Cecil, Lord Burghley, while below are numerous achievements showing the alliances of the family of Thynne. Heraldry

plays a large part in the adornment of this glorious apartment, and it is employed in admirable sculptured form. Thus, at the other end of the hall, below the small gallery, are the arms of Savile, Lord Halifax, with the owl crest and the motto, "Be Fast," and over a door on the south side is the shield of Devereux, Earl of Essex. The white marble mantel-piece, supported by fluted Ionic columns, consists of caraytid figures, bearing a carved entablature, and a clock and wind-dial are enframed. The great hunting pictures which line the lofty walls above the panelling are by Wootton, and

include portraits of the second Lord Weymouth, who was a great lover of the chase, and his friends, who were often entertained at Longleat. The hall was adorned at a time when such apartments had lost their importance as the common resorts of the household, where its members were used to meet and eat together, above the salt or below, as the case might be. But the magnificent chamber of Lord Bath's house was designed to bespeak, as it were, the character of the dwellers in the house. The trophies of the chase, like the great hunting pictures, tell of their tastes and diversions. The numerous escutcheons are the token of their high lineage and kinship with many great houses in the land. The enrichment of design and detail tells of their love for the "house beautiful."

Not, perhaps, in every part does the old spirit prevail as in this noble hall, but the remodelling by Sir Jeffrey Wyattville had become necessary. The north side of the house had indeed been many years in partial ruin when he undertook the work for the Marquess. It is remembered that the architect found in an old flue of the kitchen chimney more than one hundred skeletons of jackdaws and other birds, and he discovered many other things which it was necessary to remove. There is no intention of cataloguing the rooms and their pictures here. The illustrations will suggest how charming many of the internal features are, and it will be seen that much is due to the fine work of the sculptor and wood-carver.

It is usual to pass from the Hall to the corridor, where are some excellent examples of old furniture, and upon the walls hang many family and other portraits by Kneller, Lely, Mytens, Janssen, and various well-known artists.

In the South Library the pictures include portraits of Henry VIII. and the Protector Somerset by Holbein, and of Bishop Ken, who lived many years at Longleat as the guest of the noble owner of his time. The Drawing Room is an attractive apartment, possessing several fine works of great painters of the Italian schools—Pinturicchio, Ghirlandajo, Mantegna, and Raphael. In the Saloon is much splendid old tapestry, with a beautiful sculptured mantel in white marble. The Dining Room is full of fine family portraits, and includes one of "Tom of Ten Thousand," who built or reconstructed the room. Thus we reach the great staircase, which was the work of Wyattville. It is hung mostly with hunting pictures, and leads to the upper corridors and rooms, which are adorned with curious and interesting paintings, not to be described here.

Both internally and externally Longleat is full of interest. Its long series of stately and beautiful chambers represents the taste and character of three centuries, and each of them has something beautiful, attractive, or instructive to disclose. Happily for many, the noble owner of the place, at particular times and seasons, allows others some share in the beauties of his palatial abode. As Mr. Repton, who admired its magnificent gardens, said in 1803—and the same is true to-day—Longleat, "far from being locked up to exclude mankind from partaking of its scenery, is always open, and visitors are allowed freely to amuse themselves, which circumstance tends to enliven the scene; to extend a more general knowledge of its beauty to strangers; and to mark the liberality of the noble proprietor, in thus deigning to share with others the good he enjoys."