

LITTLE MORETON HALL, CHESHIRE.

LITTLE MORETON HALL—or, as it is sometimes called, Moreton Old Hall—stands between Congleton and Newcastle-under-Lyme, and is one of the most remarkable houses of its historic class. Some excellent judges have, indeed, declared it to be the finest of all our English timber-framed houses of the sixteenth century. These pages illustrate many beautiful antique dwelling-places of the same character of construction, and among them Bramall, which stands upon the same level, though Moreton may probably be regarded as *primus inter pares*. Its distinguishing merits as a structure are its great variety and boldness of design, the solidity of its oaken framing, internally and externally, and the richness and elaboration of its detail. Moreover, and some may think most of all, it bears the visible marks of those who dwelt in it, of those who were concerned in the building of it, and of those who were hospitably entertained within its walls. It is

thus a supremely interesting embodiment of the domestic life of old England. Distinction did not light upon any one of its possessors. Not one of them, that we know of, was famous at court or in the field; but each of them lived the life of a country gentleman, sharing the occupations and the tastes of his neighbours and sometimes holding high rivalry with them.

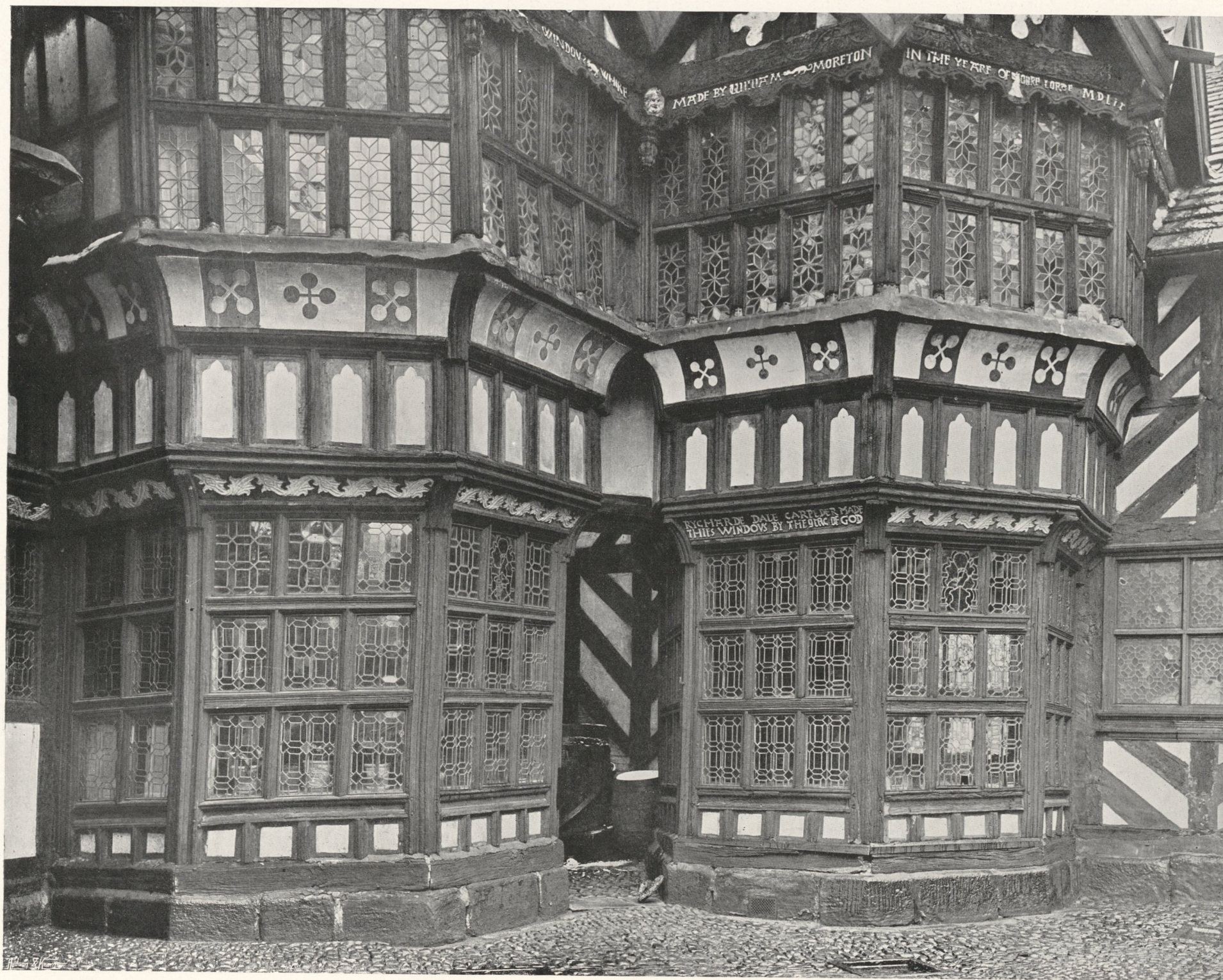
The Moretons have lived here and hereabout from a time to which the knowledge of man runneth not to the contrary. At least to the Conquest we can trace them, for one Gralam de Lostock, in the time of Henry III., was fourth in descent from a certain Hugh de Runchamp, who was then the grantee. The singular Christian name of Gralam appears more than once on the family tree. The grandson of the possessor so designated was another Gralam, but, by his time, as the manner was, the surname, which beforetime had been of no fixed character, had been changed, and was established as Moreton. To Gralam de



THE ENTRANCE FROM THE BRIDGE.



THE PORCH AND HALL WINDOW.



LITTLE MORETON HALL.

THE TWO BAYS IN THE COURTYARD.

Moreton succeeded a Richard, who lived in the time of Edward II., and to him John, after whom came two Ralphs. Sir Richard de Moreton was living in 1449, and was succeeded by Ralph and William. Those were turbulent times, and the Moretons appear to have been concerned in civil broil, for neighbour was often against neighbour in the Wars of the Roses.

William Moreton, who lived in the days of Henry VII. and his successor, and who married the daughter of Sir Andrew Brereton of Brereton, was a squire who valued himself, and appears to have had much consideration amongst his neighbours. He had a dispute as to his right of precedence with Thomas Rode of Rode, which took a singular turn. It came before George Bromley, Lieutenant Justice of Chester, with whom was associated in arbitration Sir William Brereton, but the man of law left the decision to the Cheshire Knight. The dispute between Moreton and Rode was as to "which shuld sit highest in the churche, and foremost goo in procession." Brereton, therefore, to settle this weighty matter, called to him "xii of the most auncyent men inhabiting within the parish of Astlebery," and equitably and cautiously gave the step of local honour to the disputant "that may dispende in landes, by title of enheritaunce, 10 mark or above more than the other."

What a picture does this give us of the state of local feeling—arising, we may be sure, from earlier embitterment—in the time when the proud house of Moreton was raised, though whether it was actually built by this owner or

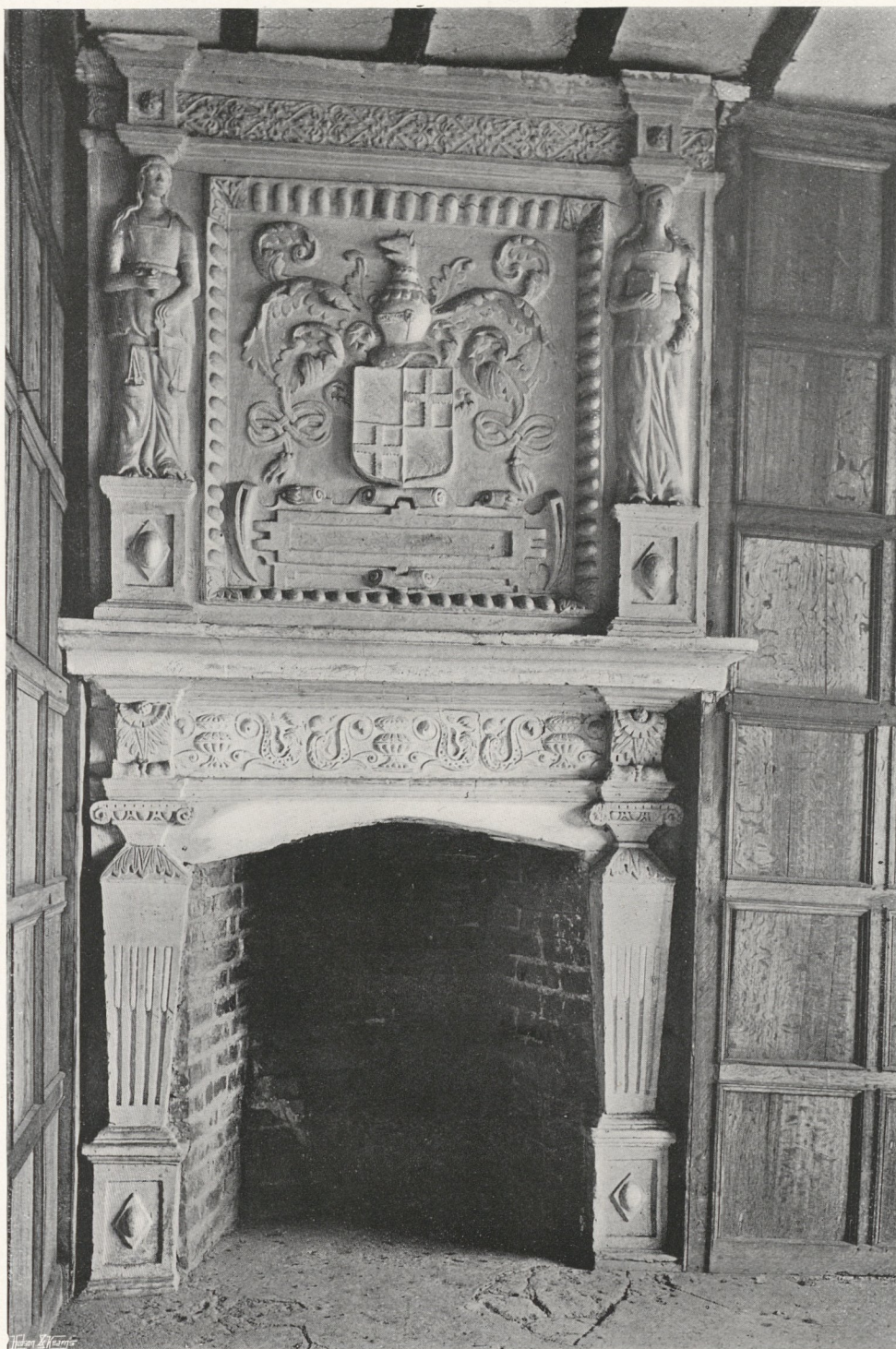
by his son, Sir William Moreton, who died early in Elizabeth's reign, we are not quite sure. Both of them had a hand in it, and we may surmise that some of the work of their ancestors is embodied in the structure. Certainly there had been a house on the site before, and there are mounds within and without the moat which seem to show that it had been castellated, or at least had had the resource of strong towers, to which the inhabitants, in the extremity of siege,

could fly. "God is Al in Al Thing; This Windows whire made by William Moreton in the yeare of oure Lorde M.D.LIX."

"Richard Dale, carpe'der made thies windovs by the grac' of God." Such are the inscriptions upon two of the magnificent bays in the courtyard. All honour, then, to William Moreton, the liberal owner, and to Richard Dale, the splendid craftsman, who laboured and wrought so skilfully and so well.

The old mansion is moated, like most of the houses of the date in Lancashire and Cheshire, and the buildings surround three sides of a quadrangle, which originally

was completely enclosed. The approach is now by a stone bridge spanning the moat on the south side, but before reaching it the visitor has satisfied his eye with a view of the extremely beautiful and attractive character of the exterior. The admirable effect of the rich and varied timber-work, the quaintness of the overhanging storeys, and the elaboration of the carved barge-boards and windows, is extremely fine. The character of the carving and its very interesting details are seen in the picture taken from the bridge,



CHIMNEY-PIECE IN THE RETIRING ROOM.



THE GREAT BAY IN THE BANQUETING HALL.



THE PANELLED DRAWING-ROOM.



LITTLE MORETON HALL.

THE BAY WINDOW IN THE DRAWING-ROOM.

where the trefoil panelling above is united with twisted pillars, richly capped, and a cornice over the portal in which the discerning eye will detect a faint trace of the classic influence. There is entrancing fascination at the very portal, which is sustained wherever we go in this superb dwelling-place.

Within the court the same character of elaborated structural timbering is seen, with the same enriched detail. Opposite to the entrance is the porch admitting to the house, with a projecting gabled structure to the left of it, and the truly magnificent bays on the right, each comprising five sides of an octagon, which William Moreton and Richard Dale built. The porch itself is remarkably beautiful, with a low Tudor arch, twisted pillars, and advancing stages above, with quatrefoils, supporting the window of the upper room and the gable. As to the unrivalled bays, the pictures are better description than words. Yet attention may be drawn to the charming mouldings of mullions and transoms, the admirable character of the window leading, the delightful scroll carving, the trefoil-headed structural panelling, all most deftly moulded, and again the variety of the quatrefoil adornment on the hollow above, carrying up the eye to the magnificent windows and the gable. Much as there is even now of beautiful timbering in England, and particularly in Lancashire and Cheshire, we do not know anything to rival this. It will be observed that the structure rises from a plane base of squared stone, but everything



THE WESTERN GABLE OF THE GALLERY.

else is wood, plaster, lead, and glass, with, we believe, some wicker in the construction. The gables and ridges give a most admirable skyline.

On the right of the lobby or passage-way, entered from the porch, is the old Banqueting Hall, answering to the great halls of the preceding period, and having the characteristic feature of a magnificent bay window. Here the Hall has not the lofty, stately form of earlier times, and the apartment is not large, but the grand character of the work, its subdued richness, the fine colouring of the panelling, and the excellent details complete a domestic interior of rare loveliness. A great moulded oaken beam crosses the opening of the bay internally, supported by carved spandrels, one adorned with a traceried pattern, such as was much used in Perpendicular architecture, and the other with a grotesque animal. Some old glass remains in the house, but, of course, much has been broken. Now, or recently, there were inscriptions on the panes, for it appears to have been the desire of the

Moretons that their friends should leave such memorials of themselves. Thus were inscribed: "Somerford Old-field, 11 of Apr., 1627"; "Henry Mainwaringe—All change I scorne"; "Margaret Moreton, Aug. 3, 1649"; and others. The arms of Moreton and Brereton in the glass, the badge of Lancaster, the rebus of the Moretons—M and W intertwined, with a tun—and other devices add to the interest of the structure.

The magnificent panelled Drawing Room is illustrated in two of the pictures. Its ceiling, of solid oak, with heavy main and secondary moulded ribs, and its deeply-



THE EASTERN GABLE OF THE GALLERY.



THE LONG GALLERY.

worked wainscot, is of extraordinary interest, while the great bay, with its five sides, is a room in itself of ravishing charm. Where shall we go to find anything so sturdily, honestly built, and so gloriously adorned, dating from that time? Other places may be more magnificent, but for unspoiled beauty Little Moreton Hall is scarcely excelled. The whole house is full of interest. Thus, the Chapel on the east side, probably the oldest part of the existing structure, is divided by a screen into two parts, and has a very low ceiling, while at the east end is a painted window, and black-letter texts appear upon the walls. Here was cut in a pane a verse full of the spirit of moralising and raillery so often manifested in the society of the seventeenth century :

"Men can noe more knowe weoman's mynde by kaire
Then by her shaddow judge whet clothes she weare."

But nothing, perhaps, in the house is more interesting than the Gallery in the roof, which is 68ft. in length by 12ft. in width. It is oak-wainscoted from floor to cornice, with mullioned and transomed windows on both sides, and has an open timber roof with moulded tie-beams and panelled struts, the space between the timber being occupied by curious and unusual timber-work filled in with plaster. Most curious are the adornments of the gabled ends. On the west, over the window, is a figure of Fortune, blindfolded, with her wheel suspended above, inscribed "Qui modo scandit corruiat statim," and the motto below, "The Wheele of Fortune whose rule is ignoraunce." The companion figure at the other end is Destiny, with her spear

erect, transpiercing a terrestrial globe, and the inscription on either side of her, "The speare of Destinye whose ruler is Knowledge." These unusual conceits add much to the interest of this charming and remarkable interior. A small oak-panelled chamber, known as the Retiring Room, is adjacent to the Gallery, and here a fine Jacobean mantel-piece, with a low arch, ornamental pillars, and the Moreton arms above between well-carved figures of Justice and Learning, attracts attention. We have already spoken of the elaboration of the structure, which is exemplified in these two apartments, and it may be added that the builder also adorned the old chambers with angels blowing upon double trumpets, women wearing coronets, chaplets of laurel, and other figures and devices.

The direct male line of the Moretons of Little Moreton Hall—the branch at Great Moreton Hall having passed its heritage by marriage to the Norfolk family of Bellot in the reign of Henry IV.—terminated in 1762 with Sir William Moreton, Knight, Recorder of London, whose nephew, the Rev. Richard Taylor, rector of West Dean, Sussex (who died in 1784), assumed the name. He was the father of the Rev. William Moreton Moreton, whose sons died, leaving his daughters as co-heiresses of the splendid Cheshire abode. The present possessor, Miss Elizabeth Moreton, takes the greatest interest in her splendid heritage, and has done a great deal to preserve it from decay. Swept and garnished it is, as we may see, and fortunate in being in good hands. So may it long continue to speak of the arts, the architecture, and the social life of former times.