

COMBE ABBEY, WARWICKSHIRE.

IN a hollow between a grassy, well-timbered park and a stretch of woodland, the stones of Combe Abbey were first laid as long ago as the reign of King John, for the benefit of a community of Cistercian monks, then an order barely a hundred years old, with the severest of rules and discipline. The graves and stone coffins of some of the monks have been discovered in the park, but of the Abbey there is nothing remaining, save an ambulatory or cloister open to the air, which has been carefully restored and well preserved. Combe shared the fate of other religious houses under Henry VIII., and fell into lay hands while retaining its monastic title. Late in the reign of Elizabeth it again changed owners, and in the early part of the next century was in possession of Lord Harrington, in whose household James I., after the custom of those times, wished his only daughter, Princess Elizabeth, to be educated. At Combe the Princess spent her childhood and early girlhood, and there she wrote many letters, which are still preserved, to her favourite brother, the short-lived Henry, Prince of Wales (died 1612). In her seventeenth year Elizabeth married Frederick V., Elector Palatine of the Rhine, afterwards, by election, King of Bohemia, and all through her troubled and stormy life, whether at the petty Court at Heidelberg, or reigning at Prague, or crownless, penniless,

and in exile in Holland, she kept before her eyes the memory of the home where her peaceful childhood was spent. Years later, in the evening of her days, when her nephew Charles II. was restored to his throne, she returned to England, and her faithful friend, Sir William Craven, bought Combe for her from the creditors of Lucy Countess of Bedford, the daughter and heiress of Lord Harrington. But Elizabeth was not destined to realise her dream. Before the enlargements and embellishments of the house were completed she



THE STATE BEDROOM.



THE WEST CLOISTERS.



THE TAPESTRY ROOM.

died in London, in the sixty-sixth year of her age.

Sir William Craven was created Earl of Craven, but at his death the earldom died out, being renewed in 1801, while the Craven barony

The house stands in the neighbourhood of the quaint old town of Coventry, and is built round three sides of a courtyard, and on the right hand, over the ancient ambulatory, towers the "New Wing," as it is called,



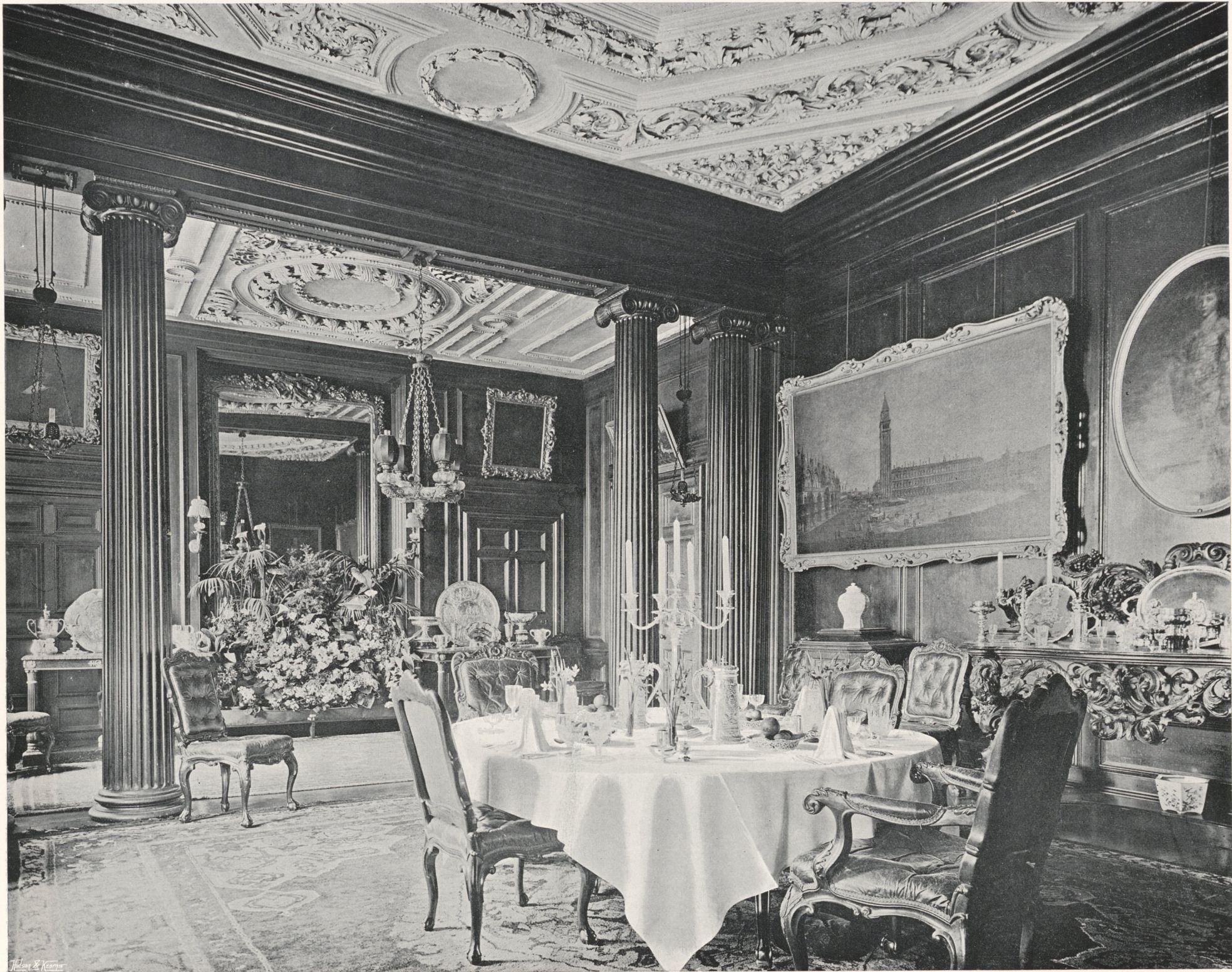
LADY CRAVEN'S ROOM.

had meanwhile remained in the family. Thirty years ago the second Earl of the new creation pulled down a portion of the Abbey, and began to rebuild it on a newer and more magnificent scale, but died before his work was completed.

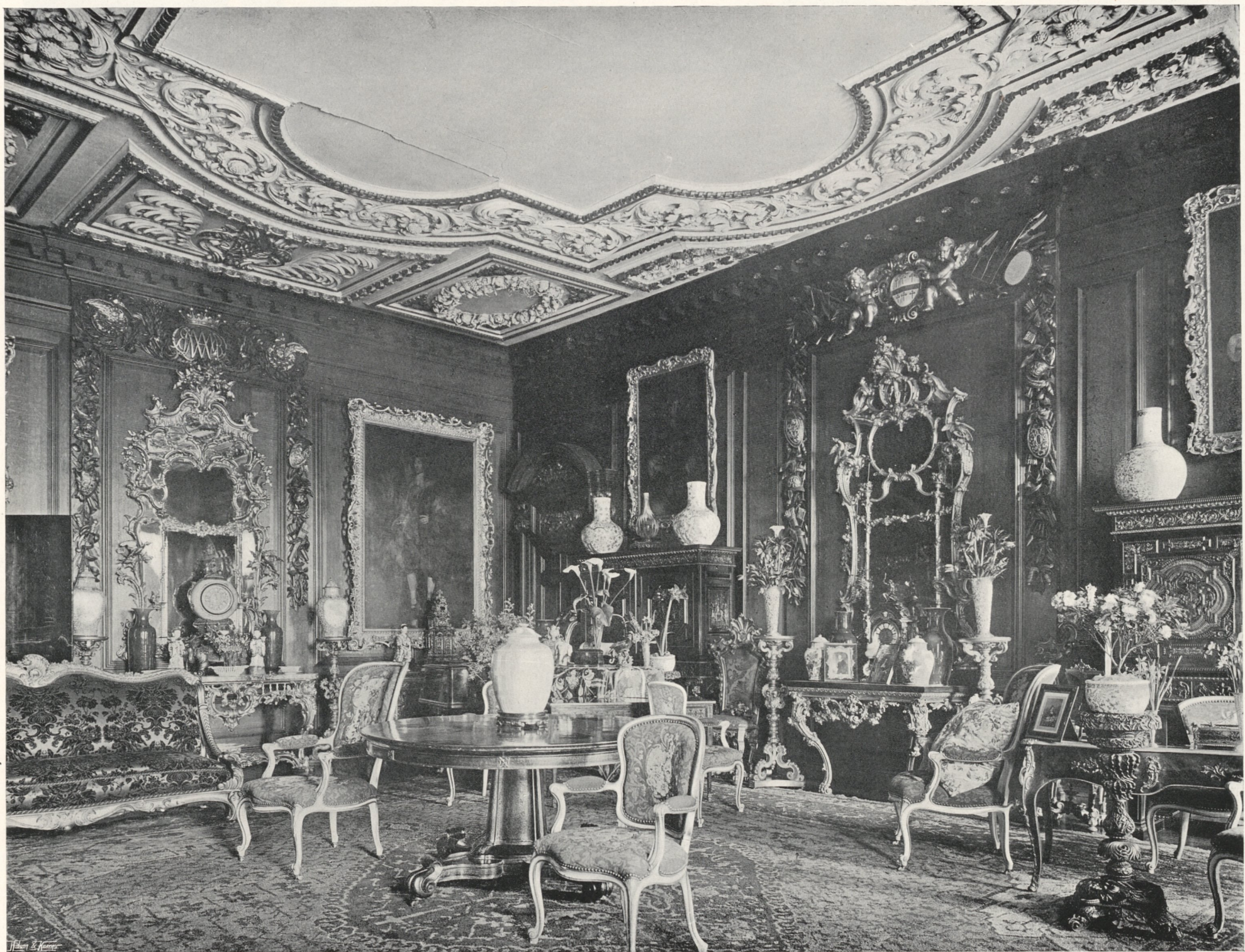
dwarfing the old part, which forms an irregular V at right angles to it. The entrance is on the left-hand side of the courtyard, and leads immediately into a wide corridor running the length of the old part, which is known as the



LORD CRAVEN'S ROOM.



THE DINING-ROOM.



THE DRAWING-ROOM.

Cloisters, and is lighted by high windows with diamond-shaped panes, and some pieces of stained glass. The Cloisters are garnished with many weapons of war, trophies of swords and daggers,

Cloisters hangs a full-length portrait of Elizabeth Lady Craven, afterwards Margravine of Anspach.

Leading out of the Cloisters is Lady Craven's boudoir, containing a beautiful head of



THE NORTH CLOISTER.

quaint old cannon, and suits of armour, among them that in which the then Lord Craven appeared as the Knight of the Griffin in the Eglinton tournament. At one end of the

Barbara Palmer, Duchess of Cleveland, and a small picture of Charles I. and Henrietta Maria, said to be the only miniature by Van Dyck in existence. The windows look over the moat,

and the glass is engraved with sporting scenes. Parallel with this room is the Hunting Parlour, panelled with oak and ornamented with sporting trophies and arms of a bygone age. These two rooms are both somewhat low, with deep window seats, and probably, with the bedrooms above them, belong to the structure in which the Princess Elizabeth played and studied with her chosen companions, Dorothy and Lucy Percy. In the wide passage outside the Hunting Parlour are two rows of portraits of Court beauties, of little value as paintings, though interesting to the student of Charles II.'s era. A small oak staircase leads upward into three bedrooms of the same date, with deep mullioned windows, and walls covered with Dutch tapestry. In one is a particularly fine carved oak chimney-piece, bearing many elaborate coats of arms. In another a large portrait of Charles II., in Garter robes, hangs over the mantel-piece. The fine panelling and enriched carving in this part of the house are exceedingly interesting.

The wing ascribed to Inigo Jones adjoins. A wide staircase connects the two portions, forming a gallery of family portraits hung without regard to date or painter, and at the foot is the Brown Parlour, which looks out over sloping lawns to the lake. The Brown Parlour contains some fine pictures, notably a Rembrandt of Eli and Samuel, and four representing musicians. Over the fireplace is the portrait of Lucy Countess of Bedford, the lady to pay whose debts, contracted at the gaming-table, the house and lands of Combe were sold. Here, too, is the portrait of the first Duke of Richmond, son of Charles II. and Louise de Querouaille, Duchess of Portsmouth, and grandfather of the eccentric Elizabeth, Margravine of Anspach. Next to the Brown Parlour is the Dining Room, a fine large apartment, admirably panelled, having a beautifully enriched ceiling in plaster, and divided towards the end by fluted Ionic columns. A portrait by Lely hangs over the carved fireplace, and on the walls are a couple of much-admired Canalettos, besides a picture of Henry,

Prince of Wales, more remarkable for singularity than beauty.

Above these rooms are the two State Bedrooms of the house, each remarkable for its fine plaster ceiling of marvellous modelling and execution. One in particular has a most beautiful frieze running round the walls of the room with almost the appearance of lacework. The tapestry and adornments are very interesting. On the same floor is a bedroom called the "Bohemian," chiefly interesting for its portraits of the Bohemian Royal Family.

The finest room in the house in point of size is the North Parlour, which runs along nearly the whole northern side of the courtyard parallel with the Cloisters, and has been decorated in yellow satin. Upon its walls hang many interesting portraits, including the Queen of Bohemia and Prince Rupert. Near it the vaguely named "Breakfast" Staircase leads to the Brocadilla Rooms, which look out over the park, and are modern in furnishing. Another staircase of note is the octagonal one in the body of the house, which leads from the Cloisters up to the very roof, where is a sealed passage, popularly called the Nun's Walk, from the alleged apparition therein of a totally unauthenticated and highly improbable ghost. There is much evidence that some of the occupiers of the house have been connoisseurs, as it is full of *objets d'art*, valuable china, and cabinets of great beauty. In the Library are many interesting books, including a volume of letters from the Queen of Bohemia to the first Earl of Craven, written in the most affectionate strain, and some curious memoirs by the Margravine of Anspach.

The New Wing is too modern to contain any very noteworthy features, but is a fine specimen of mid-Victorian architecture. Certainly, in a county second to none in England for the number and picturesqueness of its "stately homes," Combe Abbey cannot be called unworthy to compete with any one of them on the score of beauty or historical interest.