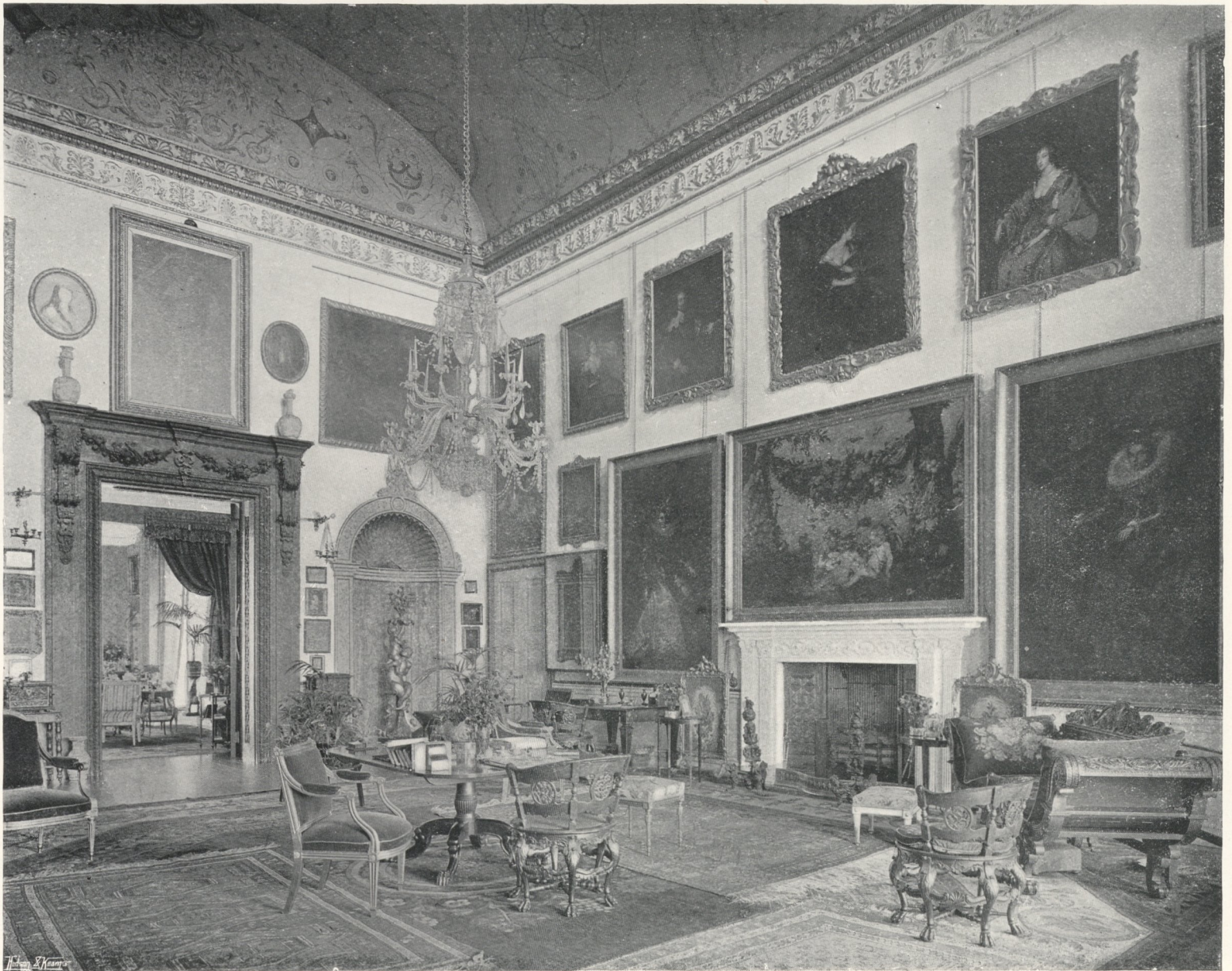


KINGSTON LACY, DORSET.

MANY and varied in the realms of architecture, of the art of the painter and sculptor, and of the work of the decorator's hand, are the things that attract us in this famous Dorsetshire house, which lies within some two miles of old Wimborne Minster on the Blandford road. The place owes its name in the first place to some king of early times, and in the next to its having been possessed by the great house of Lacy, Earls of Lincoln. It then had the good fortune to come into possession of the old family of Bankes, and Sir Ralph Bankes began the house shortly after the Restoration. Sir John Bankes, Chief Justice of the Common Pleas, who had preceded him, was a remarkable man in his time, of high

professional reputation, and of wealth rapidly growing. Before being raised to the Bench, the future Chief Justice represented the Crown in the famous case of John Hampden. He adhered steadily to the King's cause, but, for a time, earned the Royal displeasure by caution and moderation, and was regarded favourably by the Parliament, which requested that he should be continued in his office. He had purchased the estate of Corfe Castle from the widow of Sir Edward Coke, and his wife, Lady Mary, will ever be famous for the heroic stand she made there during a period of nearly three years, in which there were really two sieges. The assailants were compelled to draw off at the end of the first of them, but finally the



THE SALOON.



THE LIBRARY.

place was reduced by the treachery of one of the garrison, and Lady Banks was allowed to depart with the full honours of war. Several pictures which belonged to her husband, and which had adorned the castle, are now at Kingston Lacy, where the keys of the stronghold and other memorials of the defence are preserved. There, also, in a fine gallery below the great marble staircase, stands her statue in bronze, holding the sword and the key, while in a beautiful niche is a seated bronze figure of the king in whose cause she waged war so stoutly, with a

bas-relief below of the castle she defended so well. The family has given birth to several other distinguished sons. Mr. Henry Banks of Kingston Lacy, great-great-grandson of the Chief Justice, sat for forty-six years for the close Borough of Corfe Castle, and afterwards for his county, and was a general supporter of Pitt and a prominent member of the House of Commons. His elder son, Mr. William John Banks, was the well-known traveller in the East; and another son, Mr. George Banks, who died in 1856, was the last lawyer to hold the office

of Cursitor Baron of the Exchequer, and for a great many years represented Corfe Castle and Wareham in Parliament.

Having said so much about the family of the possessors, we may turn to the house itself, built, as we have said, by Sir Ralph Banks. In the pediment of the north front appears the date 1663, which makes it impossible for the work to have been carried on under Inigo Jones, as some have suggested, for that architect died in 1652, but his kinsman Webb may

well have been engaged upon it. It has since undergone many changes, its old red brick having been faced with stone, and much constructive work has been done over the main cornice. Sir Charles Barry was the architect, and many features of the Italian style were added about the year 1854. The mansion is a building of stately character, with much dignity in its features, and having fine balustraded terraces and gardens for its foreground.

Within, the house which Sir Ralph



THE SPANISH ROOM.

Bankes built, and which his successors have adorned, is dignified also, and invested with some character of magnificence, while, as a treasure-house of art, it is well known to all connoisseurs. A great love for the manifestations of Italian art has given peculiar distinction to the place, and the richness of the materials employed internally adds greatly to the subdued charm of the structure. The beautiful gallery, which has been referred to, with its bronze statues, brings the visitor to the magnificent marble stairway, 30ft. in width, which was added by Mr. William John Bankes about the year 1834, at the suggestion of Sir Charles Barry. The staircase is of white Carrara marble, but variegated marbles have been used for the balustrades, with bronzes, statues, and candelabra, and the whole character is that of stately splendour. The doors are framed in marble, and the friezes, carvings, and moulded plaster-work are admirable in craftsmanship.

The rooms of the house are lofty and well proportioned, and not one of them is without objects of supreme interest. Successive owners have added to the great collections of pictures, many of which are by the most famous masters. Some of them, as we have said, once adorned the walls of Corfe Castle, and certain of these seem to have been presented to the family by Charles I. There are beautiful vases, inlaid cabinets, miniatures, enamels, and many other forms of art adornment, but the pictures exceed all else in interest. The late Mr. W. J. Bankes was a great collector, particularly of Italian and Spanish pictures, but many of the best examples have been in the possession of the family ever since they were painted. Some of them have magnificently carved frames, and there are certainly few collections that can rival that at Kingston Lacy in their varied attraction.

The rich and beautiful apartment known as the Spanish Room is one of the most notable in the house, being a perfectly harmonious composition of rare and admirable forms. Its walls are covered with Cordova leather-work, and it has a ceiling which came from the Contarini Palace at Venice, designed by Sansovino, and having a central compartment representing the apotheosis of a saint by Paul Veronese, and compartments containing cupids by Pordenone. The enriched framing of this ceiling, and the delightful fancy shown in the supporting cornice and the frieze below, will be observed in the picture, as also the beautiful bronzes and rare embellishments of the apartment. It is not our purpose to catalogue the pictures, but a very fine whole-length of Philip IV., by Velasquez, and a head of Cardinal Borgia, by the same artist, may be referred to, as also Murillo's famous "Beggar Boys," a remarkable "Saint Augustine Receiving Inspiration from Heaven," and a beautiful "Santa Rosa and the Infant Saviour." This

Spanish collection includes paintings by Zurbaran, Ribalta, Morales, Espinosa, and others. Extraordinarily interesting are the pictures in the Saloon, which include two whole-lengths by Rubens, one of them of the Marchesa Spinola, as bride of the Doge Doria, and the other of Maria Grimaldi, brought from the Grimaldi Palace at Genoa. There are magnificent Van Dycks of Charles I., Queen Henrietta Maria, the Prince of Wales, afterwards Charles II., the Duke of York, afterwards James II., and the Princess Mary. These are the pictures from Corfe Castle. Another extremely beautiful work is a Raphael in the artist's late manner, which bears the mark of Charles II., and was brought from the Escorial. It has a magnificent carved frame, with the arms of all its former possessors. Here also Titian, Salvator Rosa, and Sir Peter Lely are represented.

The beautiful Library has its walls clothed with valuable books, and above them several notable pictures, including St. Gregory, St. Jerome, St. Augustine, and St. Ambrose. But perhaps the most remarkable feature is the great ceiling composition by Guido, which represents Dawn sending forth Day and Night, truly a colossal picture of great nobility and beautiful colouring, although it seems, in its way, overpowering. The Dining Room is distinguished by the possession of a magnificent "Judgment of Solomon," by Giorgione, and of works of Carracci and Tintoretto. The Drawing Room, which has a charming interior, has priceless treasures upon its walls. Here are examples of Van Dyck, Cornelius Janssen, Van der Velde, Greuze, Reynolds, Romney, and Lawrence. A gem of the collection is Romney's full-length portrait of Mrs. Bankes, the wife of Henry Bankes, the politician, being one of that artist's most successful pictures. Reynolds is represented by a portrait of the same lady's mother. We have said enough to show how truly splendid is the great collection at Kingston Lacy, and there are examples of many other artists of various schools.

Sir Joshua Reynolds visited the house with Dr. Johnson, and made curious notes upon the paintings he saw there, saying: "I never had fully appreciated Sir Peter Lely till I had seen these portraits." The portraits he referred to were those of three lovely daughters of the house of Bankes. A curious record exists of the visit of Dr. Johnson to the house. He appears to have been rather bored with the pictures, strange as that may seem, when we remember that Reynolds was his companion, and he retired to a corner of the room, where his curious gestures attracted the attention of his host. He appears to have extended himself in a chair so as to occupy a good deal of the floor space, whereupon Mr. Bankes courteously assured him that, though the house was not new, the flooring was perfectly safe, upon which the Doctor started from his reverie "like a



THE GALLERY

person wakened out of his sleep, but spake not a word."

We shall leave our pictures to tell further the story of the beauties of the interior of Kingston Lacy. The glory of the stairway will be divined from the picture of the Gallery, with its splendid balustrade, its Grecian candelabra, its statuary, and its great picture by Schneiders. The rich adornments of the Spanish Room, its panelled and elaborate ceiling, its cornice, frieze, and

leather-work, and its wonderful pictures, are well represented. The stately dignity of the Saloon, the enrichment of its doorways, its shell-arched niches, its lustre and bronzes, and, more than all, its glorious works of celebrated artists the tasteful character of the Drawing Room, with its glorious Romney, and the ordered dignity of the Library, will all suggest to readers the grandeur, splendour, and numberless beauties of this stately Dorsetshire mansion.



THE MARBLE STAIRWAY.

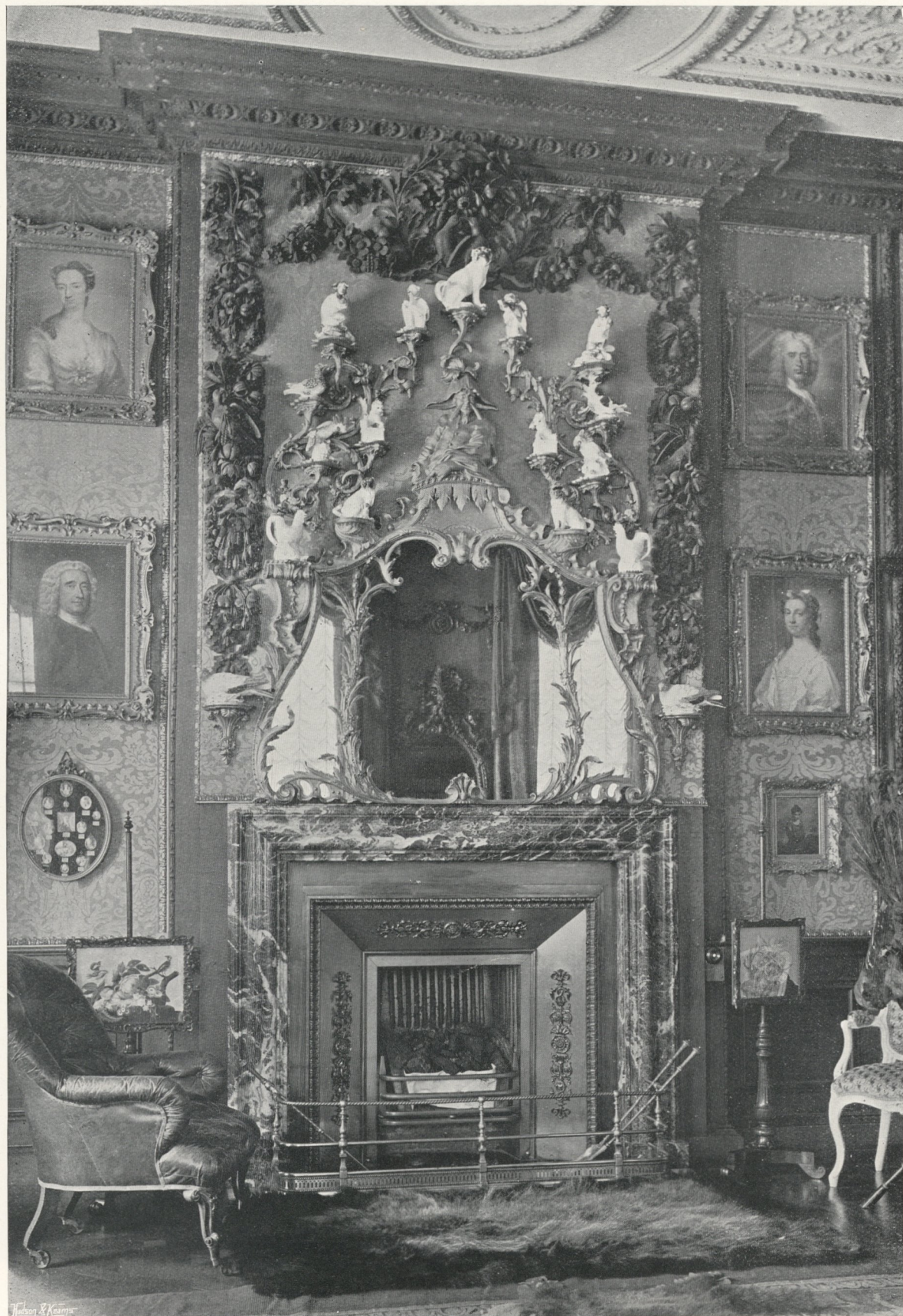
MELBURY HOUSE, DORSET.

MELBURY HOUSE, Lord Ilchester's splendid country place, is pre-eminent among the mansions of Dorsetshire, and few houses in

England are more nobly seated or command a fairer prospect. Representing various successive styles of architecture, it is girt about with a quaint yet harmonious dignity, and impresses the spectator as representing the taste of many successive members of the family of its noble owner. Well worthy of the house, too, is the prospect which its windows command, and it would be a difficult task to discover a great estate in which the beauties of Nature and of man's handiwork are more harmoniously united.

Much might be said of the glories of its landscape prospects and the beauties of its park, its woods, its gardens, and its grounds, but our purpose is with the house itself. Melbury was built, according to Leland, by Sir Giles Strangways, who died in 1547, "with a lofty and fresche tower," but some part of the mansion may be assigned to an earlier date, though not before the fifteenth century, which is also the period when the village church was built. The whole house seems to have

been largely reconstructed at the beginning of the eighteenth century, embodying much of its predecessor, which both Leland and Croker



THE CHIMNEY-PIECE IN THE SQUARE DRAWING-ROOM.

speak of as the "largest and completest" in the county. Stephen Fox, projector of, and generous benefactor to, Chelsea Hospital, created Lord Ilchester and Stavordale and Baron of Redlynch in 1747, and Earl of Ilchester in 1756, was the first of his family to be ennobled, and

classic portico, a stone bridge of ten arches leading to the main entrance. The house is full of beautiful, rare, and curious objects; and the dignity and charm of its rooms are sufficient reason for the love that Lord and Lady Ilchester have always retained for this beautiful Dorset



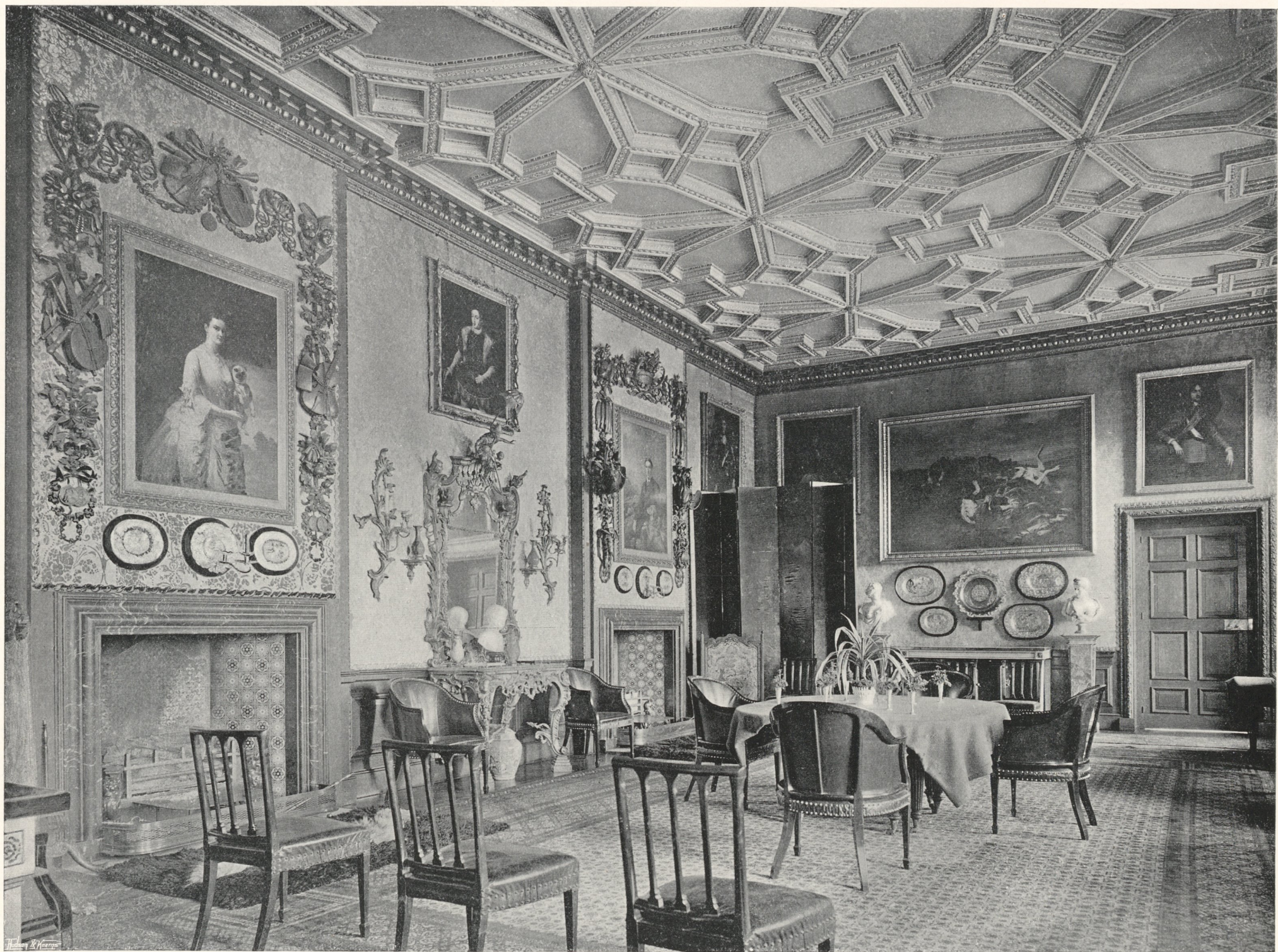
THE BILLIARD-ROOM AND CORRIDOR.

he added the name of Strangways to his own upon his marriage.

The plan of Melbury forms three limbs of a cross, with the tower, which is hexagonal in shape, rising in the midst. The east front is of the period of Queen Anne, and has a fine

seat, although they have others in the county in Abbotsbury Castle and Chantmarle.

In some ways the most conclusive test of a great house is the drawing-rooms, and if this is applied, Melbury certainly comes out triumphant. In not a few of the rooms in the mansion are



MELBURY HOUSE.

THE DINING-ROOM.

to be found singularly fine examples of the art of Grinling Gibbons, the great English wood-carver. In what is called the Square Drawing Room is a wonderful chimney-piece, in which, within festoons of fine old carving of fruit and flowers, is a mirror of the later Chippendale

ground for the pictures and old carved mirrors, which give to the apartment considerable distinction.

The Drawing Room proper has a singular charm of its own. Hangings of pale green silk contribute to make it light and bright, an effect



THE LIBRARY.

style, with a number of small brackets, which support quaint figures of birds and animals; and beneath these brackets are flowing foliated lines of the most exquisite grace. The walls of the room are covered with old silk of a delicate pale green colour, which forms an ideal back-

enhanced by the ceiling, with its tasteful and deeply-recessed mouldings. On the walls hang comparatively few, but admirably chosen, pictures, several of them being landscapes, with a few figure subjects. Anything approaching to overcrowding has been avoided, and the general effect



THE SQUARE DRAWING-ROOM.

of the room is one of dignified beauty attained by the exercise of refined taste.

The "Redlynch Room" is especially attractive,

almost the severity, of the classical style and of the cold white marble gains distinction by the introduction of an eagle and scrollwork



THE MARBLE CHIMNEY-PIECE IN THE "REDLYNCH ROOM."

with an admirable mantel-piece, which serves as the frame for a good old family portrait. It is extremely simple in design, and bears mark of the skill of the craftsman. The restraint,

in old gold. The eagle stretches his wings triumphantly above the entablature, and from his claws depends the graceful scrollwork which twines round the two beautifully-proportioned Corinthian



THE BOUDOIR—DATE ABOUT 1590.

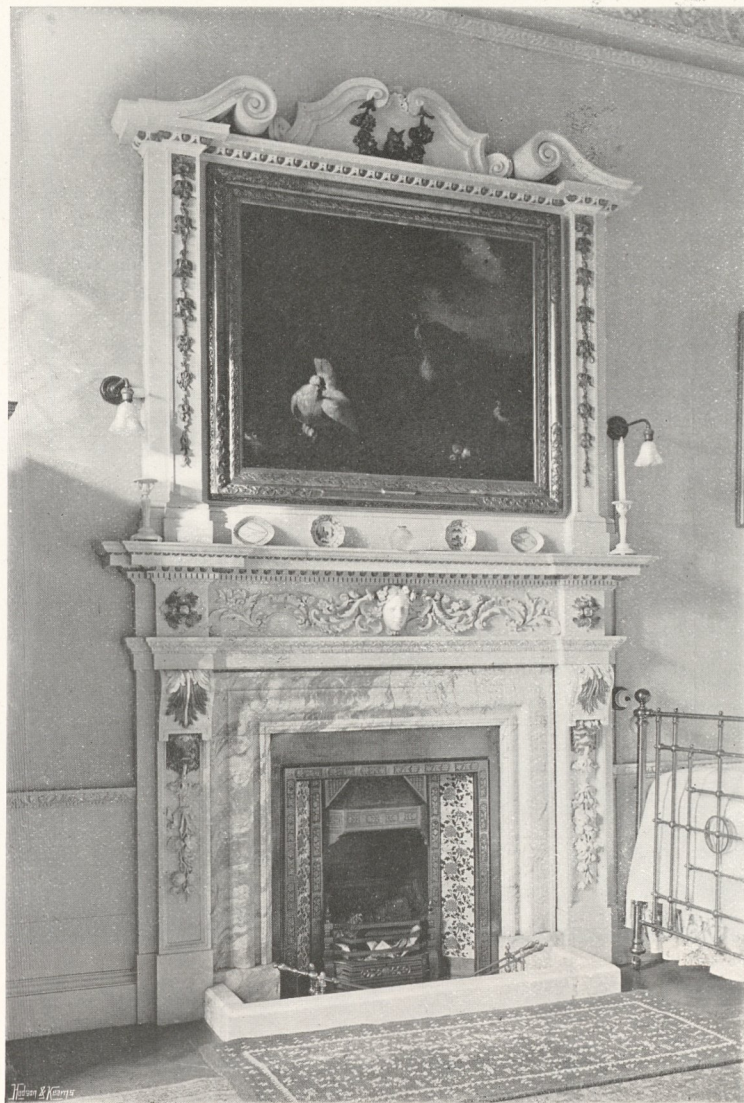
columns, which flank the portrait in the centre. Scarcely less beautiful is another chimney-piece in a Dressing Room of the Redlynch suite, which is also of white marble, but it is of a less stately and more homelike character. It enframes a large picture of doves in a landscape, and the decoration is perhaps somewhat more conventional, and has a richer and less severely classical effect.

The Dining Room, like all the rooms at Melbury, has a character of its own. Here, again, we find exquisite carving of the Grinling Gibbons school over the two fireplaces, enshrining two family portraits. In these carvings the master hand has introduced in the one case trophies of musical instruments, and in the other of dead game and fish. The walls are hung with very old cream-coloured silk, and the ceiling is richly recessed in geometrical patterns. The pictures on the walls are for the most part family portraits.

Perhaps the most remarkable room in Melbury is the Boudoir. It might seem impossible for a room of any size to get lost even in a great house, yet it is the fact that the Boudoir was completely hidden away, and not discovered until quite recent times. It is assigned by antiquaries to about the year 1590. The chimney-piece and the ceiling are richly decorated in the style of the English Renaissance. The ceiling, recessed in geometrical patterns, bears many floreated bosses

and heraldic animals, while running all round the walls, which are hung with cream-tinted silk, is a floreated band carrying numerous coats of arms associated with the family and its intermarriages. Altogether, the decoration gives an effect of peculiar richness, which is enhanced by the admirable pictures on the walls. In the Billiard Room is a fine bay window with some ancient heraldic glass, which has survived the vicissitudes of centuries, and here are old tapestry and fine furniture much to be admired.

The Library is the only room in the house of modern date, it having been added from the designs of Mr. Salvin, and it is the last room in Lord Ilchester's beautiful abode to be spoken of here. It has a fine open-timbered roof, with dependent bosses and stone brackets bearing coats of arms. Here, as in many another room at Melbury, may be seen swans of the loveliest plumage, stuffed and mounted as screens. These come from Abbotsbury Castle, where is, probably, the largest swannery in the kingdom. The pictures on the walls are few, and consist of family portraits by great masters. There are several good Canalettos and a Rembrandt. In some ways more interesting even than these is an admirably spirited portrait of Molly Lepel, the first Lady Hervey, standing in the quaint and characteristic dress of the period, with a little dog by her side—an excellent example of the work of Hogarth.



A MARBLE CHIMNEY-PIECE.