



*THE CEILING OF THE GREAT HALL.*

Brownlow left no children, and his sister Anne, who was his heiress, conveyed Belton to her husband, Sir Richard Cust, second baronet. Their son was Sir John Cust, born in 1718, who represented Grantham in Parliament from 1743 until his death in 1770, and was Speaker of the House of Commons from 1761 to the same year. He assumed office in the first Parliament of George III., and held it at a stormy time in Parliamentary history, when Wilkes was thrice returned for Middlesex and was expelled and replaced. Wilkes and his friends made Sir John Cust an object of bitter invective, and Wraxall says the chair was never filled with less dignity or energy. Walpole, on the other hand, says that it was well filled, and certainly Sir John Cust earned Royal favour. He wore himself out in the toils of his office, and his son, Sir Brownlow Cust, was created, in 1776, Baron Brownlow of Belton, expressly in recognition of his father's Parliamentary services.

The first Lord Brownlow employed James Wyatt to alter and improve Belton House. A desire for change had passed over the country, and there was scarcely a county or a large town in England which did not exhibit some public or private building due to that active architect.

He built Heaton House, near Manchester, for Sir Thomas Egerton, Fonthill for Mr. Beckford, and added two wings to Chiswick House, the Duke of Devonshire's suburban place. At Belton House he removed the cupola, which has since been replaced, made the Drawing Room more lofty, and effected some other changes. The splendid character of the plaster-work will be noticed; and however much we may regret that Wren's structure should have been modified, we must recognise much that was good in the work of Wyatt. There is excellent character in the house generally, charming picturesqueness in its courtyard, and lavish beauty in its iron grilles and many of its details.

Numerous interesting portraits are at Belton, including examples of Lely, Reynolds, Romney, and Hoppner. But, as we have said, internally nothing is so interesting as the beautiful work of Gibbons, exemplified in the cedar paneling of the Chapel, the pendent groups, flowers, fruit, and game of the Drawing Room, and other examples, not excelled, if they are equalled, by anything from the same hand that can be shown at Blenheim, Cassiobury, Houghton, or other great houses.