

CASTLE ASHBY, NORTHAMPTON.

AMONG the great seats of middle England this noble domain ranks with those that are pre-eminent, standing in a lovely region of England aloft upon a hill, and being in this respect unlike most old

Northamptonshire houses, whose builders sought the safety of the moat in the hollow. A more ancient house stood upon the site, "crenellated" by licence in 1306, by Walter de Langton, Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield. It passed

with his sister, Alice, to her husband, Robert Peveril, in 1315, and, after being in dispute, came successively to Sir William de la Pole and to Edward Grey, created Earl of Kent in 1465. It was afterwards sold to the ancestor of its present owner, Sir William Compton, a courtier standing high in the friendship and favour of Henry VIII., who had great personal regard for him, and took him into his intimacy. The knight accompanied the King when he rode into the lists at a tournament in Richmond Park, and the skill and gallantry of Henry and his companion attracted general admiration. Compton was, by accident, dangerously injured, but afterwards many times distinguished himself, and showed his prowess in the lists and the field. His grandson, Sir Henry Compton, created Baron Compton in 1572, was the builder of Castle Ashby, to which additions were made, and in which improvements were effected, by his successors.

The house was raised at a time when English noblemen and gentlemen were rivalling one another in the splendour and extent of their dwelling-places. The Elizabethan house of Lord Compton consisted of a centre with two projecting wings in a manner common to the time. The quadrangular form came later, when Inigo Jones connected the two wings on



THE FOOT OF THE STAIRWAY.