

TYTHROP HOUSE, OXFORDSHIRE.

THE pictures which illustrate the fine work at Tythrop House are the indication of the work of a master craftsman in wood.

Nowhere else do we know of a stairway richer or more splendid in style of adornment. There is much else at that fine mansion which might have been depicted, but we have chosen the noble stairway, with its three ascents and its gallery, as the feature best worthy of being brought before our readers. Many as are the views held as to the true principles of adornment, the object to be sought in our endeavours—whether Nature should be reproduced as she is, or be transmuted into a new and conventional form, whether simplicity should be desired or elaboration, whether structural features should be emphasised or concealed—whatever views, we say, are held as to the plenishings and adornments of the home, there is not anywhere the man who undervalues craftsmanship, the evidence of thought expressed by the human hand; and thus there is no one who will not admire the marvellous carving of the great stairway at Tythrop House. This masterpiece, as we are told, and can well believe, is from the hand of Grinling Gibbons. It was impossible for that marvellous man to execute all the commissions offered to him in the time of his prosperity, when the trembling flowers of wood over his doorway in La Belle Sauvage Court had attested his skill, and when the admiration of John Evelyn and the patronage and employment of Christopher Wren had made him famous. There were those who worked with him and for him, under his direction and guidance—men like Selden,

who lost his life in saving the carved room at Petworth from a destructive fire; like Henry Phillips, who was with him at Whitehall; and like Watson, who laboured at Chatsworth, though there are those who contend that the latter worked independently of Gibbons, and was a genius on his own account. It is not necessary, evidently, to hold that Gibbons with his own hand executed the whole of the beautiful work at Tythrop House, but unquestionably his mind and influence are there. The pillar support at the foot is beautified with fruit and foliage carved in bold relief, and is supported by remarkably handsome scrollwork. The scroll design, which figures so prominently in Renaissance panel-work, is the dominant motive in this magnificent work of the chisel. Nowhere is the carving surpassed in the boldness, freedom, and lightness of the curves. In the perforated balustrade—if the word may be used where there

are no balusters—these flowing and graceful forms assume the character of twisting growths in the conventional classic taste. There is a quality in the lines and manner that will not escape anyone. Beautifully sculptured cherubs are in this bold curling greenery, forcing their way through, as it were, in their efforts to ascend, while others support crowns, and there are heraldic birds in wreaths, and much else to give variety. The carved newel-posts are marvels of this fine craftsmanship. In truth, this wood-carving is not, in its style and manner, excelled.

Tythrop House is about two and a-quarter miles to the east of Thame, within the liberty of Tythrop, in the county of Oxford,



DRAWING-ROOM CHIMNEY-PIECE.