ATHELHAMPTON, DORSET.

AT Athelhampton the Martyns were seated in early Plantagenet times, and here in the latter half of the fifteenth century Sir William Martyn rebuilt the more ancient home of his forefathers, and gave us a fine specimen of the architecture of his age—or at least as much of it as the vandalism of the nineteenth century owners failed to destroy.



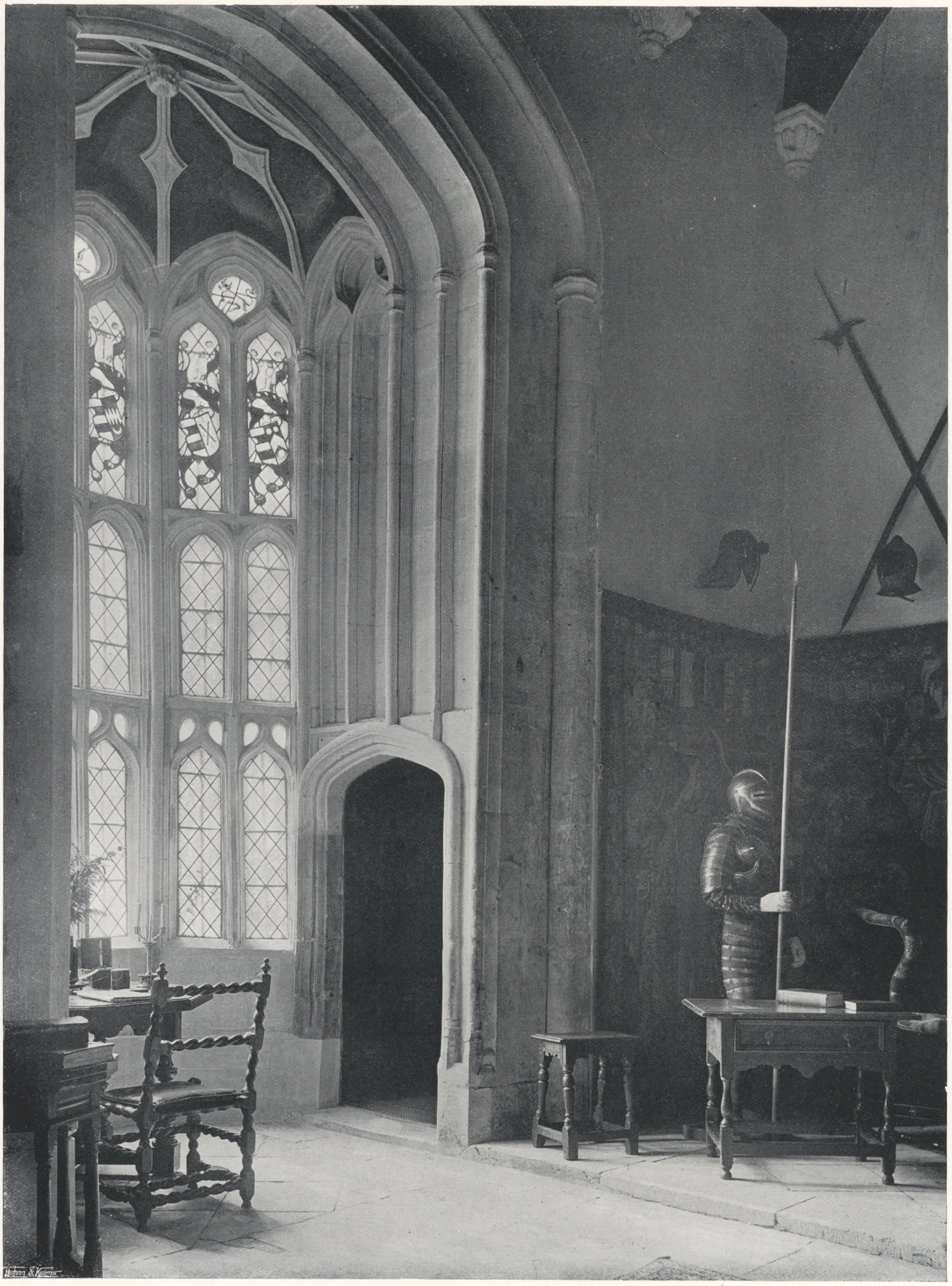
BREAKFAST PARLOUR.

Nicholas, the last of the Martyns, died in 1595, and Athelhampton has since then seen many lords of many names, the last of which were wholly unappreciative of its worth and charms, until in 1891 it was purchased by its present owner, who has not only repaired and preserved, with infinite judgment and knowledge, such portions of the originally vast home of the Martyns as he found standing, but has also replaced, largely with the original scattered fragments, certain portions that had been ruthlessly torn down as late as 1862 to provide material for farm stabling. Luckily the destroying hand stopped short of the hall, which remains much as the Martyns built it in the fifteenth century. The stone flags of the floor, which rises in a low dais at the upper end, are original work. Original, too, is the stately timber roof, 50ft. high, with gilded bosses; original also the tall oriel window, a gem of late Gothic work, roofed with groining. Mr. de Lafontaine found this hall in utter wretchedness. The roof, blanched with mildew, was happily sound, and was brought back to life and beauty. Outside, the earth rose above the floor level, so that at times water stood on the dank flags. The walls were blotched with "grained oak" wall-paper, over the lower hall was a

deal gallery, and one of the high windows had been repaired with cement and wooden mullions. The ground has now been lowered, with the result that the hall floor is dry in all weathers. The lost window has been restored from the model of its fellow, seen above the panelling in our view of the hall, a window which has original armorial glass, recalling the armorial windows so happily brought back of late years to the ancient manor house of Ockwells, the four lights showing the shields, helms and crests of Martyn, Faringdon, Pydel and another. Pydel bore in his shield four birds' heads, which play on his name, the heads being those of the dunpyddle, or moor-buzzard. Following the fashion of this glass, Mr. de Lafontaine has restored to the other windows the armorial honours which were formerly their ornament. The walls have been clad for half their height in linen-fold panels, and the old work of the fifteenth



GREAT HALL: NORTH SIDE.



TO THE KING'S ANTE-CHAMBER.



THE GREAT HALL.



THE KING'S ANTE-CHAMBER.



THE GREAT PARLOUR.

century screens, noticeable for the great length of its linen panels, was brought from Devonshire. Richly-coloured hangings with the arms of a Spanish house hang over the two doorways in this screen.

When Mr. de Lafontaine came to Athelhampton he found no remains of the household furniture which had once garnished it, and all the rare pieces which now fill every room are of his own collection. The buffets in the hall are of the greatest interest; one, richly carved with tracery emblems of the Passion and figures of the Annunciation, is a very early piece of English Gothic furniture, and is in a wonderfully perfect state. A second buffet cupboard of early sixteenth century date has panels boldly and elaborately carved. One picture shows a third important cupboard, and a fine draw-table of simple lines, and many pieces of a collection of armour and weapons. By far the most remarkable among these pieces is a plain salade or open faced helmet, probably Italian work of the fifteenth century, its original lining still in its place. The piece is, perhaps, the sole example of its class, in that an over-helmet fits above the first, the upper one being of heavily gilded copper wrought in the form of a lion's head with fierce mouth and staring eyes. It may be hazarded that this addition made the piece both helmet and armorial crest to its bearer. Besides this may be noted some of those great two-handed swords with which the stubborn Switzers shore heads and limbs from the



ORATORY IN STATE CHAMBER.



NORTH SIDE, LONG LIBRARY.



IN THE STATE CHAMBER.

enemies of Swiss freedom or of the King who hired them, a good sixteenth century harness of plates, and a long rapier hooked up by its original hangers.

From the bay of the great oriel window of Athelhampton Hall, a low door leads to the room called the King's ante-chamber. What king it was who gave his name here, or when he came visiting Athelhampton, is uncertain; but legend has it that the Hall was once, in the days when Sir James Long owned it, the merrier for the presence of the second Charles. Save for a frieze of plain plaster, the King's ante-chamber is panelled in oak, and above it has a beautiful timbered ceiling. In the open fireplace are cresset-topped fire-dogs, and behind them a cast-iron fire-back, with King Charles himself on horseback. A dwarf sideboard cupboard has the initials W.H.A., with the date 1667. On the walls hang a morion and a peascod breastplate enriched with broad stripes of engraving. With other weapons below this harness are a two-handed sword and a long rapier with wide quills and a fluted blade, an elegant piece of swordsmith's work. Underneath these weapons stands a fine leather chest, studded and richly patterned with brass nails, its excellent condition silently testifying to the old saying, "there's nothing like leather"; indeed, these leather boxes seem at times to rival the endurance of wood, and take the buffets of the centuries with even lesser hurt. By this ante-chamber is reached the great parlour, a handsome room with mullioned windows, whose upper lights have shields of the Martyn alliances in coloured glass of indifferent quality compared with the work in the panes of the hall's high window. The decoration of this room is still unfinished, as our picture shows; but the seventeenth century table, with turned legs, is of interest, as are also the curious fire-dogs with heads like bishops' crosiers. A piece of a dress of Queen Elizabeth may be seen in this room. An ancient newel staircase goes upwards from the King's ante-chamber, the lower steps being of stone and the upper of solid log-timber, which gives no hollow note under the heel. This winding stair is the King's Way. Its first landing gives upon the long gallery or library, a room of great size and presence, with fine panelling and a plaster ceiling of very beautiful design, the round panels of whose curved ribbing contain the Tudor rose as their chief motif. In the thickness of the wall lurks a secret staircase; and for whatever end a secret stairway may have been contrived, it never fails to bring a pleasant chill of ancient mystery to the beholder. Many curious matters are preserved in this room. Here are the boots worn by King Charles I. as a boy, and the richly broidered gloves of Henry VIII. These gloves are of buff leather, light coloured, and thin. At the wrist is a pleating of rose silk ribbon, edged with gold lace, and each wide cuff is divided into eight panels of ornaments like the leaves of a fan. Heart's-ease, roses and other flowers in bright silks adorn these panels on a white ground, the flowers being stalked with gold thread. Near them a pair of seventeenth century gloves were once the covering of the first Stuart's Royal fingers. The leather is brown, cuff and glove being in one piece. The cuff broidery is in silk with gold and silver thread, the Scottish thistle being seen in the pattern. Edged with gold fringe and lined with red silk, they are gallant and handsome gloves, although hardly as fine as the rare gloves before-named, gloves for which an antiquarian De Lorge might leap among the lions. Here, too, is preserved one of those rare treasures, a first folio Shakespeare.

On the wall by the door hangs a pair of French bellows of wood, enriched with that delicate metal-work which Louis XVI. loved to hammer and braze, and this pair might well come from his workshop, for the fire upon which they blew burned in the Grand Trianon. Returning again to the great hall, we cross its pavement and go out through a doorway in the screens to rooms which were once serving-rooms to the hall, the butler's chamber and the plate-room. One of these is now the green parlour, so named from the green brocade of Florence which covers the walls. The second doorway opens on the oak parlour, once a scullery and back entry in which a pump stood. It is wainscoted and ceiled with Athelhampton oak, cut from oak beams in the house, removed because their ends were rotting dangerously. On the first floor is the State bed-chamber, with its original oak panelling. The Gothic panelled chimney-piece, beside which a little doorway enters the oratory, is of Ham Hill stone. Above the fireplace it is carved in deep ogival moulded panels, set alternately with flowers and fluted shields, with the lance-nick in their corners. The shields have no bearings, so they might in old time have been painted with the arms of the Martyns; but below them may be seen little beasts which stand for the house and its matches—Martyn's chained ape and the unicorn of the Faringdons. On the overmantel stands a garnish of rare Oriental china. It will hardly be credited that the woodwork of this magnificent room was found painted and grained in yellow, to the taste of the dull farmers who lay in it. Not only have the panels been brought back to their own rich hue, but the chamber has been replenished with furniture worthy of so lordly a bedroom. The bedstead, whose height seems exaggerated in the perspective of our picture of it, is a famous example of the late Elizabethan type, although it belongs to the beginning of the next reign.

Remark the play of light and shade on the many depths of the tester's ceiling-mouldings, and the temple-like bases, with their four

columns, upon which rest the squat urns and cheveron moulded tester-posts. Human figures stand in high relief upon the stiles of the back; and the frieze below the cornice is corbelled out with leopards' heads. Unhappily no photograph can do justice at the same time to bold carver's work and to such inlaid figures as are found in the panels of the back. SPES MEA XP'S is the motto found there, with the initials W. G., and the date A° D'NI 1609. The bed-cover of scarcely later date is a fine example in mellow green and yellow wools of the patient needle-work of the seventeenth century. The strange vegetation and weird flowers which adorn it are peculiarly characteristic of the English work of this period. Tradition has it that this bed was made for the chamber in which it is now found; that it was carried from Athelhampton by a daughter of Brune of Athelhampton to her husband's house at Corfe Castle, and was the inheritance of Brave Mary, the most honoured ancestress of the house of Bankes of Corfe. The bed of Brave Mary might well be a treasured relic in a Dorsetshire house, for every good Dorsetshire man knows how Corfe Castle, with its little garrison and Mary at their head, bore two sieges and many assaults, and fell at last by treachery, the last stronghold held for King Charles I. between London and Exeter.

With other pieces the State bed-chamber has one of those curious chests made about the end of the sixteenth century, whose inlaid panels are figured with buildings all dome, pinnacle and window after the fashion of Henry VIII.'s summer palace, from which these hutches are called Nonesuch chests.

A Chippendale bedroom with slender mahogany posts to its bedstead contrasts with the massive furnishing of the State bed-chamber. Hangings of flowered Elizabethan embroidery decorate the bed in Mr. de Lafontaine's own room, while another contains a rare treasure in the form of a Gothic bedstead of the time of Henry VII.

Again below stairs we pass the inner door of the hall, and note that the great "spar" of timber, the oaken bolt once shot across the door, may even now be drawn out from the stone socket in the jamb. The kitchen of such a house is never the least interesting room. Here there is a brick fireplace with a very wide span under which the spits once turned. The table is of late Gothic, a kitchen table of the rarest. Old wood and pewter platters adorn the dressers.

To have saved from destruction this rare specimen of a Gothic age, to have carefully brought it back to a semblance of its ancient self, to have collected so large a number of apt and excellent pieces of genuinely old furniture, has been a triumph of patient endeavour and enlightened taste.



THE CULVER.