ADLINGTON HALL,

CHESHIRE.

THE ancient family of Legh stands high among the distinguished lines of Englishmen anciently established in that shire which has been called by one old writer "The mother and nurse of gentility," and their seat of Adlington is not only rich in memories of a hoary past, but is also in itself one of the stateliest of the venerable mansions of the shire. Macclesfield and Stockport are its unpicturesque neighbours, but each of them is five miles away, and though their fringe or penumbra spreads nearer, neither of them has spoiled the glorious old dwelling, nor broken the spell which rests upon it from the possession of long generations of men. It is a great quadrangular house of venerable aspect, though there seems to be some doubt as to whether it always surrounded the courtyard. Once it was all of timber, upon a base of stone, surrounded by a moat, "after the common sort of the building of the houses of the gentlemen of Lancashire and Cheshire," as Leland says; but on the weather side, where the great south-westerly gales swept it for centuries, there arose a classic addition or substitution completing the quadrangle, with portico, pediment and chapel, built by Mr. Charles Legh in and about the year 1757.

Thus there is a variety in the character of Adlington which is not found in many of the neighbouring houses. Some observers do not like it, and the additions are certainly incongruous; but there is this to be said for them, that the house bears the impress of many minds, and that in it we can, as it were, breathe the atmosphere of various times.

Adlington is in the district of the ancient Royal forest of Macclesfield, and the country is prettily diversified and enriched with fine chestnuts and other trees, while near by, in a hollow of the hills, is the "lordly house of Lyme," included also in this volume, which carries back the mind to the days of chivalry, for it was in recognition of services in the wars with France that the domain was bestowed upon Sir Piers Legh, a younger son of the house of Adlington.

After the Conquest, Adlington was a possession of the great Hugh Lupus, who seems to have used it as a hunting resort. It remained with his family until the time of Henry III., when it returned to the Crown, and was granted to one Hugh de Corona with many other possessions. Some of these were subsequently alienated, and Adlington became the chief residence of that family. The male line, however, became extinct in the time of Edward III., and the estate passed, by the marriage of an heiress, to John Venables of the great family of the barons of Kinderton, who had adopted his mother's name of Legh, she being the daughter and heiress of Richard Legh of West Hall near Knutsford. In this way were the families of Legh and Venables united and the historic line established in the domain of the house of De Corona.

There were four sons of the marriage, all of them progenitors of distinguished lines of a prolific family, and Adlington became, on the death of his mother in 1352, the possession of Robert de Legh, who was the ancestor of the Leghs of Adlington, Lyme and Stoneleigh, besides other branches. His great-grandson, eventually succeeding to Adlington, married the rich heiress of Sir Robert de Belgrave, greatly enlarged his possessions, and took an active part in the affairs of his time. He was engaged in the expedition to Scotland in 1385, and was knighted in the following year. He was also charged with the protection of a section of the coast, and in 1394 went with Richard II. to Ireland in the train of Thomas Earl of Nottingham, many of the Cheshire archers being with him. He acted repeatedly as Justice in Eyre, and was Sheriff of Cheshire in 1397. When Bolingbroke raised the standard of revolt, he joined him at Shrewsbury with other Cheshire knights, and when Bolingbroke came to the throne, Legh had his reward in the grant of various important offices. He was a trusted soldier, and seems to have been employed against Owen Glendower; but when the revolt of Northumberland and Nottingham broke out in the North, he was summoned to attend the Prince of Wales in person at Warrington or Preston, "with 100 defensible, honest, able bowmen, in good array for war, to go with him thence to his father the King, then on his journey to Pontefract." The knight ended his active career in 1408, when he died, leaving broad landed possessions in his shire. His son Robert was a soldier also, and accompanied Henry V. to France, but died in the great pestilence at Harfleur in October, 1415. This Robert's son, who bore the same name,



PORCH IN THE QUADRANGLE.



THE OLD HALL.

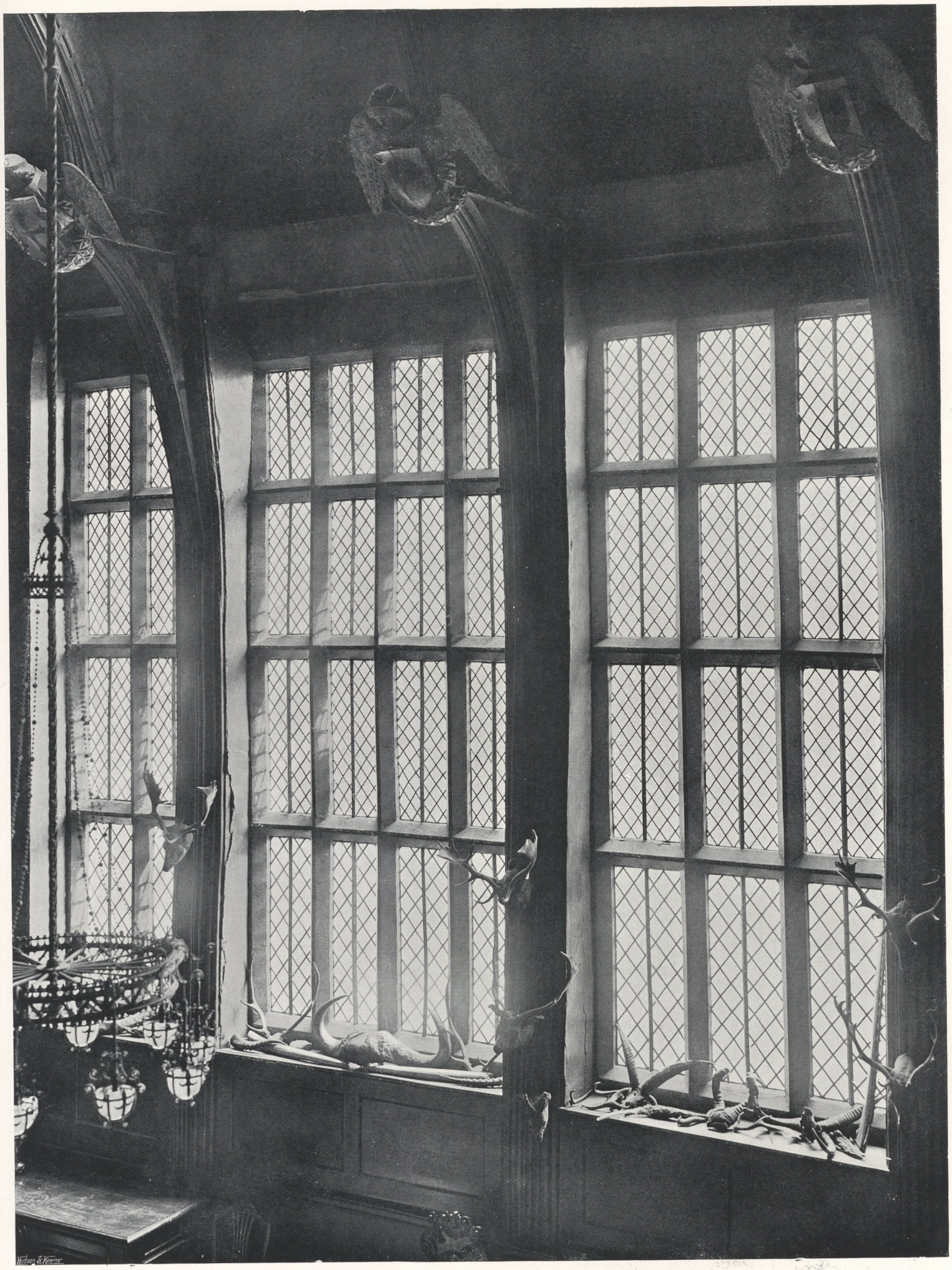
seems to have done much to the house at Adlington, and in his time a domestic chapel was built, which stood apart in the grounds, and was not, as at present, a portion of the main structure. In 1462 he had licence to "inclose and impark a wood called Whitley Hay and Adlington Wood, and also a place called Whitley Green, with liberty to hold the parks so inclosed and imparked to him and his heirs for ever." We thus see the estate growing, the house being altered or rebuilt to meet the needs of the time.

The next owner was likewise a man of martial spirit, but the Wars of the Roses, which exhausted so many, left him with estates unimpaired. With his son Thomas Legh—there had been Roberts from father to son for many generations before him, while Piers was the name favoured by the Leghs of Lyme—we reach a man who left his mark conspicuously on the structure of Adlington Hall. An attempt was made to question his right to some of his privileges, but he appears, upon a visit of *quo warranto*, to have cited the grant of Edward IV. to his grandfather, and to have proved in the year 1500 his title to free warren, the assize of bread and ale, the punishment of scolds by the cucking-stool, of bakers by amerciament or the pillory, and of brewers by the tumbrel, as well as other ancient and peculiar rights indicative of a long-dead state of society. Whether Thomas Legh actually rebuilt the house, or only enlarged and remodelled it, seems not to be definitely known. Mr. Earwaker, in his "East Cheshire," ascribes the ancient timber portion of the structure to the year 1505, on the ground that an inscription was placed at the west end of the great hall in this form: "Thomas Legh and Catarina Savage uxor ejus Ao. Dni. MCCCCCV., R. R. H. VII., XX."

How extremely beautiful and attractive is the character of the splendid timber-work is evident in the pictures. Mr. Henry Taylor, who has devoted much attention to the architecture of the old halls of Lancashire and Cheshire, expresses the opinion that the style of architecture indicates a date probably not later than the middle of the fifteenth century, although many alterations in the timber part were made by Charles and Hester Legh, who added the classic portion in the eighteenth century. There is a quaint inscription in black letter on the front of the south entrance porch of the great hall, which would assign this part of the structure to the year 1581; but it probably refers to the building of some of the stonework to replace timber, and to additional embellishments. It runs as follows: "Thomas Leyghe, esquyer, who maryed Sibbell doughter of Sr. Urian Brereton of Hondeforde Knight and by her had issue



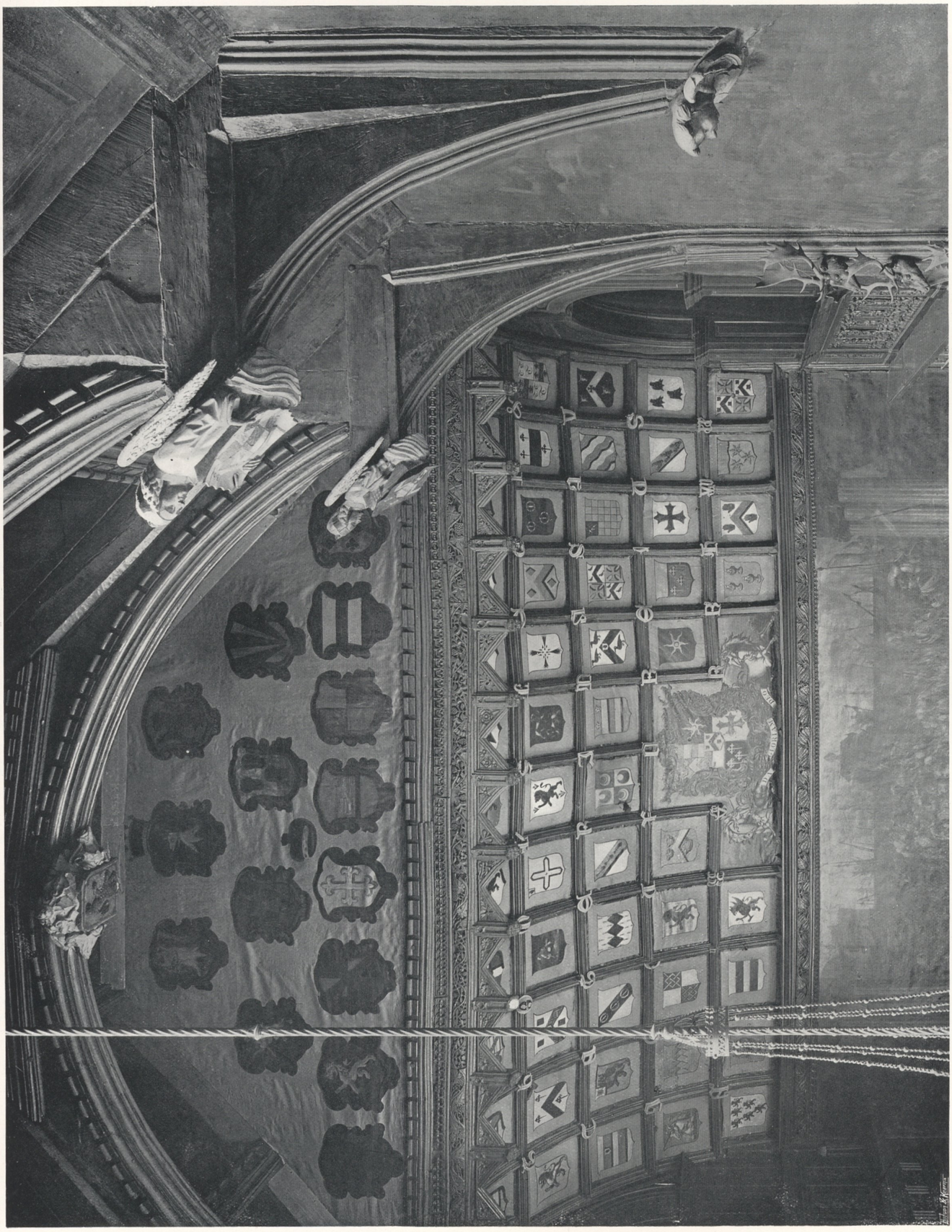
THE DRAWING-ROOM.



WINDOW IN THE OLD HALL.



THE FRESCO, NORTH CORNER OF THE HALL.



ROOF OF THE HALL.

four sonnes and fyve doughters, made this buyldinge in the yeare of our Lord God, 1581, and in the raigne of our Soveyraigne Lady Queen Elizabeth the xxiijth."

The house, as has been said, now surrounds a quadrangle, the classic front extending about 200ft., with the chapel at the east end, while the structure measures about 175ft. from north to south, and the court is 90ft. long from east to west, and 65ft. from north to south. The most



THE STUDY.

interesting part of the edifice is the great hall, which is on the north side of the courtyard, and is entered through a porch and passage, from which latter it is separated by the screen, while the great bay is at the west end lighting the dais. The dining-room, having an interesting withdrawing-room over it, and the library are on the west of the hall, and the staircase, servants' apartments and kitchen are in the eastern part of the house. The hall is a particularly noble apartment, built at a time when the great hall had reached the height of its importance in domestic construction. The knight and his family were ceasing, it is true, to sit at meat with the retainers, but the hall was the great central feature of the house, and upon its adornment was lavished all the skill of the old craftsmen. That at Adlington is 45ft. long and 26ft. wide, the height of the walls about 25ft., and the ridge of the roof about 33ft. Mr. Taylor points to a striking resemblance between the great halls of Rufford and Adlington, though in nearly all respects the latter is built in a grander and more sumptuous style. The lighting of the room is peculiar. The windows are all upon one side, with a dormer in the roof, and the paintings and adornments of the interior show to great advantage; but, as at Rufford, the sills of the windows are 6ft or 7ft. above the level of the floor, and there is thus no outlook except to the sky. The effect is very rich and beautiful, and the roof is a splendid example of the hammer-beam type, richly moulded and with finely-carved angels holding shields as the terminals of the six hammer-beams, while the posts are enriched with cusped panelling and embattlements, and the roof arches are finely moulded. Over the high table is one of the most fully-developed and elaborate canopies in the district, indicating the position of dignity with the dais and oriel. It takes the form of a cove, or quadrant, and is divided into sixty panels by moulded oaken ribs, these panels being adorned with the coats of arms of various Cheshire families — a remarkable series. Among the sixteenth and seventeenth century additions were the insertion of the Elizabethan fireplace, the panelling of the lower walls and the erection of an organ gallery. Much of the wainscoting is very notable, being beautifully moulded and carved. Such was the house in which dwelt at the end of the sixteenth century, and well on into its successor, Sir Urian Legh, a valiant knight who accompanied Essex to Cadiz, and is said to have been the hero of the ballad of "The Spanish Lady's Love," written by Thomas Deloney. Sir Urian, however, married a daughter of Sir Edmund de Trafford of Trafford, and settled down as a thrifty and prosperous Englishman. Taylor, the Water Poet, who enjoyed his hospitality, wrote a poetical account of his sojourn at Adlington in his "Pennilesse



IN THE QUADRANGLE.

Pilgrimage," the following extract from which will prove interesting :

> This weary day, when I had almost past,
> I came into Sir Urian Legh's at last;
> At Adlington, near Macksfield, he doth dwell,
> Belov'd, respected, and reputed well.
> Through his great love, my stay with him was fixt
> From Thursday night till noone on Monday next.
> . . . . . .
> He's no Carranto, cap'ring, carpet knight,
> But he knowes when and how to speak and fight.
> I cannot flatter him, say what I can,
> He's every way a compleat gentleman.

Truly a fine picture of the opulent and hospitable lord of Adlington. Sir Urian died in 1627. His son, Thomas Legh, who was twice High Sheriff of the county, was a gallant Cavalier, who, with his sons and kindred, fought much and suffered heavily in the Royal cause, his house at Adlington being besieged by Colonel Duckinfield. Legh was absent with the Royal Army, and the place surrendered, but not until his son had gallantly held it for a fortnight. The defenders were accorded the honours of war, but the house was pillaged, though not, fortunately, structurally damaged. It was soon again in the hands of the King's men, but must have been captured a second time by the Parliamentarians under Sir William Brereton, Thomas Legh's second cousin. Imprisonment and sequestration followed for the Leghs, but finally the owner was allowed to compound for his estates, the sum being £2,000.

We shall not pursue further the fortunes of the family of Legh. They have been members of a long line of country gentlemen, prominent in local society, assiduous in the care of their estates, often well known in the hunting-field, and not seldom taking a part in public affairs. They maintained and further beautified the antique structure of their abode. When the centuries had seamed too far its oaken frame, and new tastes had supervened, Mr. Charles Legh added the great south and west fronts in the taste of the eighteenth century, in the middle of which he lived. Mr. Arthur Masterton Robertson Legh married the grand-daughter of the late Mr. Charles Richard Banastre Legh—her father being Mr. F. H. Cotton of Mayfield, Derbyshire—and assumed by Royal licence the name of Legh, in lieu of that of Renny, in 1897. The house is maintained as such a venerable dwelling-place deserves to be, and, with its beautiful gardens and shady grounds, is a fine exemplar of the ancient type of the domestic architecture of that part of England.