SIZERGH CASTLE,

WESTMORLAND.

SIZERGH CASTLE lies on the border of the lake country, upon high ground, on the right bank of the water of Kent, three miles below Kendal town. Levens Hall, another famous old Westmorland mansion, is hard by it, but, unlike Levens Hall, Sizergh has been in the hands of one family almost since its history begins. The old home of the Stricklands of Sizergh has for a core one of those peel-towers which, whole or fallen in ruins, still face each other from either side of the Scottish border. The peel-tower at first stood alone; but the Stricklands soon gathered about them a force of bow-bearing tenantry which made them too great a power to be rushed by any foray of cattle-lifters, so hall and out-buildings grew about the tower. Great changes were made in these outer works, notably under Elizabeth and under George III., so that their original plan can be hardly traced; but the tower itself remains a document with which there has been little tampering. Walter of Strickland, Knight, was a man of a good estate under King John and King Henry III., his heir being one of the hostages given by the country-side for the future loyalty of a rebellious baron. An early deed shows that a chaplain served the chapel in his house, and he was a benefactor of the abbey church of St. Mary at York, the gift being confirmed by William, his great-grandson, in 1292. This William had been married long before to Elizabeth Deincourt, a knight's daughter, who, on the death of her brother, brought Sizergh to the Stricklands, and from this time onward we often hear of them.

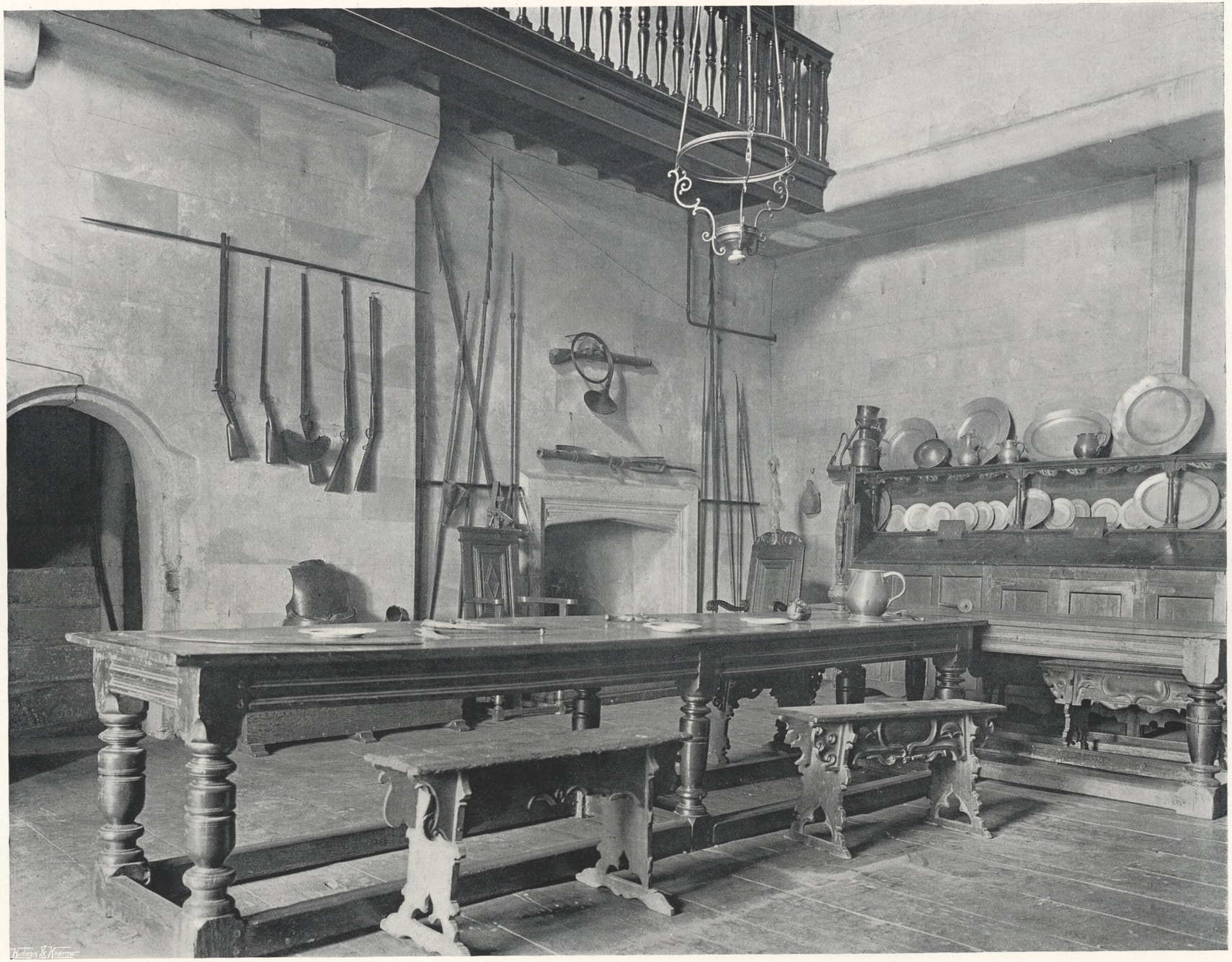
The dwellers in a peel-tower of that wild Westmorland country could not but be warriors, and what little advancement the knights of Sizergh might win was to come by their swords. Sir Walter of Strickland, the son of the Strickland and Deincourt marriage, rode at Carlaverock, and had for good service against the Scots a grant of free warren in his demesne lands, a grant made in the last year of Edward I., the Hammer of the Scots, in whose host he had



THE ENTRANCE.



THE QUEEN'S ROOM, DATE 1569.



BANQUETING HALL IN THE TOWER.



CHIMNEY-PIECE, BOYNTON ROOM, DATE 1575.



THE CHAPEL.



QUAINT PANELLING.

served. He was sheriff of the county in the next reign, and lived to see his son Thomas in the field. Thomas was in France in the Black Prince's days, and brought back another work remaining. Sir Thomas, a grandson of the last, was warring beyond the seas under the conqueror of Agincourt. His will remains, written in great haste as he took ship at



THE TAPESTRY ROOM.

Royal parchment to lie in the charter chest at Sizergh, a licence, namely, to put a park paling round his Sizergh woods in Helsington. He it was who is taken for the builder of the peel-tower of Sizergh as it stands to-day, no earlier Sandwich port to go to the crowning of the boy King, Henry VI., at Paris. His son Walter was then a boy, and there were two young daughters at Sizergh, for he prayed Mabel, his good wife, whom he trusted above all other,



SCREEN IN THE LOWER HALL, DATE 1558.



THE MORNING ROOM, DATE 1563.

to take no second husband until she had seen those two daughters "married or holpen." He survived the voyage and journey, and next year had the Pope's licence to have a chaplain and portable altar in his chapel at Sizergh. When the lad Walter came to man's estate, he was party to a most curious deed of exchange. The fighting Strickland had taken alive Harry Talbot, "a most excellent traitor" against Henry V., and for this service a 1,000-mark fee was promised him. But 1,000 marks were hard to come by; the payment lingered, and at last young Walter Strickland bartered away his claim against a grant of the office of "Keeper of the King's hounds called harriers." This Walter Strickland, "beheste and with-holded with the said Erl for terme of his life ayenst al folkes savyng his ligeance," horsed and arrayed and ever ready to ride with the earl here or beyond the sea. The Earl was to have a third of what loot he might happen upon, and should Walter be so lucky as to take a captain or man of estate prisoner of war, the Earl was to have the ransom and Walter a reasonable reward. Of another Walter Strickland, a knight who was great-grandson of the warlike squire, we have a document of another colour. Lying sick in his town of Sizergh, he made a covenant in 1526 with Alexander Kenet, doctor of physic, that the said Alexander should heal him of his diseases, and particularly those



THE DINING-ROOM, DATE 1564.

although but a Westmorland squire, and not a knight, as his fathers were, was a great man in his county, and an often-quoted document shows that Walter Strickland, deputy-steward of Kendal, could muster at a wapenshaw servants and tenants of his inherit to the remarkable number of two hundred and ninety. Eleven of these were his household servants, who followed him with bow and horse harness, the remainder being bowmen and billmen on horse and foot, whose jacks, sallets, and steel coats, bills and bows are all reckoned in the schedule. Like many another fighting squire with a stout following, he hired himself to a great lord, Richard, Earl of Salisbury, by one of those curious "indentures of war," recognising that for a yearly fee he was of the stomach, lungs and breast, the said Alexander for a £20 fee having his abode with the knight until he should be cured. The doctor must have come to Sizergh with all his gallipots, for the knight died within the year. The knight's son Walter was the great rebuilder of Sizergh. He it was who made the wings of the quad as they stand to-day, and planned the richly-panelled rooms seen in our pictures. His son Sir Thomas, a boy at his father's death, found his way to London, to the ill-fortune of his family. James I. made him Knight of the Bath on the coronation eve, and he made a figure at Court, besides finishing his father's work at Sizergh; but long afterwards his grandson, in a warning letter for

the children of Sizergh, bids them above all things avoid gambling, a crime which is in their blood. This Sir Thomas is the example, for by gambling, "which sends more brave men to Tyburn tree than any other vice," Sir Thomas reduced his house "from a plentiful fortune to a weak condition." Drinking, the same letter tells us, was not a Strickland vice, and the writer hoped that all Stricklands might be saved from taking "tobako, that bewitching smoke." Sir Thomas's son Robert took another way to ruin his family, when he and his young son Thomas led a troop of horse and a regiment of foot to fight for the King at Edgehill; but the old Cavalier lived to see Monarchy restored without losing his tower and his park. Sir Thomas the son remained faithful to the Stuarts when even Cavalier houses grew weary of the kings they had brought home again; and when James II. was harboured at St. Germain's, Sir Thomas Strickland and his lady were of that threadbare Court.

Sizergh is still the property and the seat of a Strickland, and is tenanted by a cadet of the house, Sir Gerard Strickland, K.C.M.G., Count della Catena, who has been Governor of Tasmania since 1904. In the picture of the court-yard at Sizergh, taken from its open or north-western end, we have some view of the mass of buildings to which the old house has grown. On the right rises the rubble wall of the peel-tower. The window of the top storey is original work of its fourteenth century builder, a mullioned window with trefoiled heads. The broad span of the first floor window shows that here a narrow light has been widened, for when the peel-tower stood alone its lower windows would have been little more than such shot-holes as the ground floor light. Under the third floor window is an arched panel with a carved shield of arms, Deincourt quartering Strickland, the arms of the heiress being set first after the mediæval fashion. On the helm above the shield is the holly bush crest of the Stricklands. The tower stands about 60ft. high. It has been the subject of a study by Mr. Curwen, the well-known Northern architect and antiquary, who made a scale drawing of it about twenty years since. Its basement is a vaulted chamber, whose outward walls are 7ft. thick at the least, lit only by strait-shot windows, and entered through a narrow doorway from the later house. By the doorway is a winding newel staircase leading to the first floor.

Here, on the first floor, are two of the most beautiful rooms at Sizergh, rooms in which the Elizabethan taste for warmth and comfort has transformed the feudal sternness of the fourteenth century. These are the rooms known as the dining-room and the Queen's Chamber. The former is wainscoted with panels of oak, and the richly-carved mantel-piece is one of a series set up here during the first half of the reign of Elizabeth. This one has a shield of Strickland, Deincourt, Nevill and Ward, with the holly bush crest, and supporters of a hart and a bull. The fireplace is late work, unworthy of the carving above it. The Queen's Chamber at Sizergh is that where, traditionally, Catherine Parr lodged. But there is no evidence to show that she ever was here during her wedded and widowed life, though, as the Parrs were of Kendal near by, she may have visited here in her earlier days. The room in question takes its name, without doubt, from the panel of the arms of the renowned Elizabeth, which Strickland of Sizergh, like other loyal Elizabethan gentlemen, set up when he was refitting his house. On the next floor the further end is partitioned off as a bedroom, now hung with the old tapestry, probably from the Brussels or Oudenarde looms, which Mgr. Strickland, Bishop of Namur, sent to his old home. This was until 1891 the famous inlaid room, a chamber panelled with oak, decorated with inlays of dark bog oak and holly in the Italian style. All this fine panelling was sold to the Science and Art Department for the sum of £1,000, and with it went the great bedstead made for the tower in 1568. The panelling did not go up to the ceiling, as in the case of the other rooms, but stopped short by a foot or so, and thus space was left for a very elegant frieze of plaster-work leading up to the elaborate yet reserved ceiling, where the feature lies in the octagonally panelled drops, with circles of shields and heraldic beasts occupying the intervening flat surfaces. All this plaster happily remains at Sizergh, as our illustration shows, but is reproduced above the panelling where the latter has been set up in the Victoria and Albert Museum. The main portion of this second floor is now open to the roof, "hung about with pikes, guns, and bows," and set with excellent examples of plain, massive, early seventeenth century furniture—tables, stools and pewter-bearing dresser. It has also its Tudor fireplace, and trefoiled window, but the gallery above is poor modern work, and it is evident that there was originally a ceiling between this and the first floor before the changes which made of this room a sham banqueting hall. The single room below the leads on the third floor is the haunted chamber of Sizergh, and a turret of little chambers runs up beside the peel-tower. We have reached the battlemented leads from which the old Stricklands must have looked down on more than one Border raid; a few open steps take us to the roof of this watch-turret. Under this is a shelter where the warders of the tower might lurk during rainy weather. Leaving the tower, we come, in the body of the house, to more Elizabethan work. The Boynton Chamber on the first floor commemorates in its mantel-piece the remarriage of Walter Strickland's widow with a Boynton widower; she returned to Sizergh, and here are the arms of herself and her Boynton mate in a shield among carved work. The morning room with a sixteen-quartered shield of Strickland under the pediment of the mantel-piece was the early work of Thomas Strickland, the gamester, forty years before James dubbed him a knight. The interest in the dated woodwork lies in the evidence it affords of the

patient deliberateness with which Walter, his son and his widow went about their improvements. The screen in the lower hall is dated 1558, the morning room is of 1563, the Queen's room of 1569, and the Boynton room of 1575. Yet in all this work there is a marked similarity of treatment, all three mantels having outer pilasters rising from floor to ceiling cornice, while an inner pair spring from above the fire arch, enclose an heraldic panel and support a pediment. The elaborate carving of the panels and friezes is refined in design and finished in execution. It is of the same school as the plaster frieze in the now "tapestry chamber," the inlay of whose removed panelling was highly unusual in England, though much in vogue in Italy. From Italy certainly the whole spirit and scheme of this Sizergh work came. Was the very craftsmanship also Italian, and did denizens of the sunny South frequent damp and distant Westmorland for seventeen years?

Sizergh Castle is one of those rambling houses which eighteenth century squires were eager to level with the ground and to replace with the polite Italian style. It is most fortunate in having lived through that dangerous age, suffering nothing worse than a destruction of old mullions, to make way for the sash window, and its irregular mass of stone and rubble, with a skyline of battled wall and Elizabethan barge-board, still looks towards the far hills beyond Lancaster, one of the fairest of the ancient houses of the North.



THE EAST FRONT.