WOOLLAS HALL,

WORCESTERSHIRE.

WOOLLAS HALL does not take its name from the old hall of the Hanfords. Some maps still mark it more correctly as Wollashill, and as Wollashill or Wollashull it was long ago the seat of an ancient family taking their name from their lands. House and park lie under the slope of Bredon Hill in the parish of Eckington, hard by the Gloucestershire border, between Tewkesbury and Pershore, in the country of the plum trees. The water of Avon winds within a mile of Woollas Hall, a clear river through a lovely land, and at Eckington the stream is spanned by an ancient bridge, like those at Pershore and Bidford. Here lived the Wollashulls of Wollashull, Worcestershire squires in the Middle Ages, bearing a black wolf on the silver shield of their arms. Of this house was William Wollashull of Wollashull, whose only child Catherine was wedded to a Worcestershire knight, Sir John Vampage, and through this marriage the present owner of Wollashull can trace his line to the old lords of the place. For a great-granddaughter and heir of Sir John was wife to John Hugford and begat Margaret, who married Thomas Hanford, the first Hanford of Woollas Hall, a gentleman of a Cheshire stock. In the church of Eckington you may see John Hanford of Woollas Hall, esquire, the son of Thomas and Margaret, who died in 1616, kneeling with his wife at a prayer desk, with the star of the Hanfords above him. The porch date of the hall shows that he was one of the builders of the house. His generation may have been a



EAST SIDE.



NORTH FRONT



THE GALLERY HALL.

time of peace and quiet living, for in the next there was other work forward than the building of houses. Francis Hanford, his successor, was Cavalier and recusant, and as such had a hard task to keep a roof over his head. The Royalist composition papers tell the family history of that time, the Woollas Hall esquire having been up for the King. He was dead in 1650; but his son, Walter Hanford, had his own troubles, and we find him drawing some allowance from his estates until such time as he might clear himself of his recusancy.

The Hanfords have remained firm in their religion through all changes, and harbourers of priests through those generations when the Roman office must needs be said in private places. Cut off from the public service, these families of the Roman obedience lived retired lives, marrying among their like, with little to occupy them but the sowing and reaping of their lands.

The Hanfords were never a numerous stock. At the death of Squire Charles Hanford, in the year after Waterloo, Woollas Hall passed to Charles Edward Hanford, his second cousin, then of Redmarley D'Abitot, where this younger branch had supported a school of Benedictines in the eighteenth century The elder sons of the new squire died unmarried, and his third son, Compton John Hanford, was the last male of the race, his sister's issue succeeding him. His sister had married William Flood of Farmley in Kilkenny. The present owner of Woollas Hall, Colonel John Compton Hanford, C.B., late of the 19th Hussars, took the name of Hanford alone in 1893.

About the buildings of Woollas Hall are traces of a yet older house, for doubtless there was a house here generations before the Hanfords built and roofed and Wollashulls, Vampages and Hugfords had here their hearth. But Woollas Hall, as we see it to-day, stands a noble example of the Jacobean manor house, of the type in which the old English hall, with the screens and the kitchen at one end, and the bower and solar at another, has changed utterly into the ancestor of the modern house. We build rarely nowadays with such enduring walls and in such graceful lines, but the arrangement of the chambers of this three-storeyed house speaks of the modern privacy of life, an age removed from the old days of a common hall for the common life. The time of peace in which the house rose is seen as we pace about it—a strong door to bar and window latches to shut fast are all its defences. The English squire in his house by the Avon has forgotten that ever there were wars on English ground and arms his house no more, foretelling quiet days. And yet civil war was to break over the head of this builder's son.

Woollas Hall, built of dark stone, has become a venerable house to the eye. It rises from the terrace walk above a green lawn, steps going up toward the porch, over which is the Hanfords' word, "Memorare novissima," with the date of 1611, a date when the second of this line of Hanfords was rebuilding his home. A bold oriel window looks out over the porch, the house being well lit by broad windows with mullions and transoms. The little garret windows between the gables of the roof show how in these new-fashioned houses chamber-room was found for those servants who in the older house would have slept in outbuildings or sprawled about the benches of the hall, even as Russian servants in our own day will lie about passages or landings. Although no longer the main body of the house, the hall remains as one of the rooms of John Hanford's building—we see it in our picture, a stately room with the Hanford wyvern crest and a great shield of the Hanford star over the fireplace. Its chief feature is its screen of oaken panels and carved pilasters, above which run the balusters of a gallery, and here some fine pieces of old English furniture are seen. Behind the house rises the broad back of Bredon Hill, one of whose streams once turned the spit at the kitchen fire of Woollas Hall.