METHLEY HALL,

YORKSHIRE.

METHLEY, like its neighbours Temple Newsam and Kippax, is a great house in a park, caught, to its misfortune, by the net of railways that make for Leeds, Dewsbury and Wakefield. All the discomfort of Yorkshire prosperity is at hand; the drift of smoke comes down the air from far-distant chimneys, collieries throw up their dark mounds and the water of Calder flows inkily foul from the washing of shoddy.

Most of Methley parish is low-lying land between Calder and Aire, Methley Hall being on higher ground west of the church, its wooded deer park and broad gardens protecting it as well as may be from the change that beleaguers it. The hall is on an ancient site, the chief house of a manor which was Ilbert de Lacy's at the Conquest, a member of that vast holding called in later days the Honour of Pomfret. Ilbert held here in 1087 what Osulf and Cnut, a brace of Danes or Norsemen by the names of them, had held in Edward's time; and, like many another of the Lacy manors, the Church had it for souls' sake of the Lacys. St. Nicholas Hospital of Pomfret, a Lacy foundation, enjoyed its rents until 1410, when Thomas Tolston, the hospital warden, had licence to convey it in exchange for the advowsons of Gosberkirk and Wath to John Waterton of Waterton in Lincolnshire, a favoured servant of that king-paladin, Henry V., whose comptroller of household he was. His heir, when he came to die, was an only daughter; but Sir Robert his brother had his lands in Methley and elsewhere, and, settling here, married Cecily Fleming, heir of the Woodhall in Stanley. By his will Sir Robert gave 200 marks for making anew the chapel on the south side of Methley church, and in that chapel he lies by Cecily his wife. You see him there in alabaster to this day, a rose-wrought wreath about the temples of his bold-featured face. He is armed to the neck in



METHLEY HALL.



WINDOWS OF THE OLD HALL.



THE OLD NORTH-WEST FRONT.



THE HALL SCREEN.

plate harness, his feet on a lion, his arming sword and dagger buckled to the rich belt round his hips, a helm for pillow. Dame Cecily is beside him, and at her feet crouch the small hounds that

> . . . she fedde
> With rosted flesh or milk and wastel bread.

Near by is a tomb, which marks the next step in the history of Methley, for the knight upon its slab is the man who, when old Sir Robert's son was dead, childless, had the lands with young Sir Robert's sister. This sumptuous effigy is for Sir Lyon Welles, the sixth Lord Welles, who is here in his armour, beautiful in wrought alabaster, with the black lion of Welles on his tabard and the Garter at his knee. His fair and delicate dame, the Waterton heiress, lies beside him, having,



OLD OAK STAIRCASE.



A 1593 MANTEL-PIECE: OLD HAND-MADE FLOCK PAPER.

like her mother, her little dogs by her feet. A soldier, this Lord Welles, and one who died in his harness. He was made knight at Leicester with his king and friend, by the hands of the warrior Bedford. Brought up beside his young Sovereign, the Lord Welles was up for the Red Rose of Lancaster when the troubles came, and his life has filled Methley with stories of the wars. He followed the losing side, loyal while many were changing, was at the second fight of St. Albans, when King Henry, standing in the place which is called No-man's-land, saw his people slain on both sides of him, and in the next month fought his last field at Towton by Tadcaster. In the dark of a wintry Palm Sunday morning the two hosts met. The White Rose

of Rouen and the Ragged Staff bore all before them, and the blood of slain men, said one who fought there, mingling with the snow on the earth, ran in horrible wise down furrows and ditches for a two and three miles course. King Harry and the Queen fled northward to Berwick, and the dead corpse of the Lord Welles was borne away to his vault at Methley.

He fell by the sword; the axe accounted for his son and grandson under Edward IV. Then followed John, last of the Lords Welles, who had caught the spirit of the winning side. He was a Lancastrian, to whom Edward was reconciled, a lord who was at Richard's crowning, yet against him in arms at Bosworth field. Therefore he had the name of a safe and cautious man, and as such he was given a king's daughter for a bride and sat as a Viscount in a Garter stall, dying in his bed, honoured of all. At his death the lands of Welles were divided among female heirs.

When Edward IV. beheaded Richard, Lord Welles, there died with him his brother-in-law, Sir Thomas Dymoke, husband of his sister Margaret, and when the division came Methley fell to the Dymoke share. But under Elizabeth the Dymokes did not prosper. Sir Robert, in 1580, is said to have died a captive recusant at Lincoln, and Sir Edward, his son, was the last who could keep his hands on the Methley title deeds. He parted with it to one Harrison in 1583, and before ten years were over, John Savile of Bradley set his initials on his new building of the house, which, with its lands, he had probably bought about the Armada year. With John Savile a true Yorkshireman came in. Rising in Dodworth and Golcar in the fourteenth century, these Sayviles or Saviles, by marriage with the heir of Eland, had the manor of Eland, and in the next generation gained in like fashion the lands of Thornhill with a daughter of that house. Soon half the parishes round about had their Savile, and nearly thirty branches of Savile knights and squires may be reckoned. Baronetcies and peerages came to the race. An illegitimate offshoot of the old Thornhill line gave the Lords Savile of Pomfret, the second of whom, false to both parties, was Earl of Sussex the year before his king finally impeached his treason. The main Thornhill line bred a better man for higher honours in George Savile, Marquess of Halifax, the great Trimmer, "Jotham of piercing wit and pregnant thought," the pleasant cynic who "believed as much as he could" and walked delicately in the middle way.

The first Savile at Methley was the eldest of three notable brethren, of whom Henry, the second son, has the wider fame at home and abroad. "Savillius, vir doctissimus" was the Virgin Queen's tutor in that Greek tongue which in later years she confessed herself to have forgotten. With the Burghley influence and the Walsingham at his back he chose to use them to gain so retired an office as the wardenship of Merton College, where he ruled warden and autocrat, banqueting Queen and Council at the high table in his hall in 1592. Looking around him for a benefice wherewith to supplement the Merton revenues, he coveted the provostship of Eton. For this he was ineligible, but, with the Cecils to aid, had his will at last, being Eton provost in the teeth of all statutes. The friend of Bodley, he assisted the foundation of Bodley's library, and, finding geometry all but abandoned in England, and astronomy neglected, he endowed those Savillian professorships, which endure to this day. Aubrey records of this great don that he was "an extraordinary handsome man, no lady having a finer complexion," and we know something of his Merton manner, for "give me," he would say, "the plodding students. For wits I would go to Newgate. There be the wits." With him as a fellow of Merton he kept a learned younger brother, famous for his knowledge of British antiquities, a taste which he shared with their elder. It is one of the freakish incidents of a family pedigree that his only child,

> . . . the learned Savile's heir
> So early wise and lasting fair,

should make him grandfather to so light and scandalous a being as the wicked Sir Charles Sedley of Restoration times.

John Savile, eldest of the three brothers and the builder of Methley Hall, was a lawyer whose progress can be traced step by step—Serjeant-at-Law, Baron of the Exchequer and Chief Justice of the Palatine Court of Lancaster. Advanced by Burghley's influence, his legal life is chiefly famous for that he was one of those Barons of the Exchequer upholding the dangerous doctrine that a king's prerogative allowed him to levy impositions on exports and imports. His private life has a better story, for he was one of the little company that gathered to the first meeting of the Society of Antiquaries in 1572, and Camden knew him as a patron of the study. He died in London, but his heart was carried to his Yorkshire home, and in Methley church the judge in his long robe, flat cap and ruff is carved lying with one of his four wives, on either side of their son, a cavalier in armour.

The elder of his two sons, a baronet and vice-president of the North under Wentworth, had no surviving child, so John Savile the younger succeeded to Methley. As a young man he had travelled in Italy, and the editor of his father's "Reports" records with pride that the ducal head of the house of Savelli in Italy recognised him as a distant cousin, the resemblance of surnames easily bridging the gap of centuries without the superfluous aid of records. Four generations from the Duke's Yorkshire cousin came John Saville, who had the Irish Barony and Viscounty of Pollington in 1753 and the Earldom of Mexborough in 1766.

Methley Hall is still, we may take it, the house built by Sir John Savile the judge, whose I. S, with the date of 1593, appears on part of it. But it has suffered change upon change. Descending as it has done from father to son ever since John Savile succeeded his brother in 1633, each generation has left its mark. The



FOOT OF THE STAIRWAY.

glory of the old house was its long gallery, in whose windows the arms of all the gentle neighbours and kinsfolk of the Wapentake were ranked in shields of coloured glass ; but the shields were sold and scattered in the early Victorian period.

Oulton stone is the material of the mass of buildings, but our picture of the old hall front shows how few details have escaped renewal. The great size of the three hall windows, each crossed by four transoms, will be remarked. With the view of the front of the house before us, we see a great disguising of the work of the first Earl, whose arms are set high in the midst of it, as well as those of his son, the second Earl, in whose time the house within doors was held one of the most splendidly appointed in West Yorkshire for its damasks and gilt mouldings, its Sienese marbles and rich velvets. An engraving of 1822 shows this rectangular block of buildings as capped with a pediment, which held the shield, coronet and supporters as we see them to-day. The roof was edged with a stone balustrading, the windows were sashed and the two imposing bays showed their beginnings as two summer-house-like projections from the ground floor. But, on the death of the second Earl in 1830, the great Anthony Salvin was called in, the restorer of many score halls and manor houses, to whom a free hand was given at Methley, as at Windsor and the Tower, Naworth and Alnwick. To this redoubtable pupil of Nash we owe, doubtless, most that meets the eye to-day at Methley, which is now castellated and mullioned. At least we may say that he left it an imposing mass of masonry. Within doors the old hall keeps more of its ancient character, thanks to sound oak, slow to decay. In a stately room, high wainscoted with timber panels, the lion supporters of the Mexboroughs guard their shields on the newel-posts of a broad oaken stairway to the gallery above the Elizabethan screen, which Ionic pillars support, and which is of the age and character of those at Woollas Hall and Dorton House, but possesses rather more presence and elaboration. Remark on the floor of this hall, hung about with weapons and bucks' heads, two little figures of children—late seventeenth century figures, painted on board, after the curious fancy which came to us from the Low Countries—the one a boy in a full peruke caressing a kitten, the other a younger child still in long coats. The fireplace figured by us has its mantel-panel with a shield of Savile quartered with Golcar, flanked by rude figures of Hope and some less-recognisable virtue. It is of the twin-pillared type, which was the predominant pattern in 1593, when it was made, and so continued into the reign of James I. The staircase, with which another illustration is concerned, is remarkable for the heads of its newel-posts, most boldly pierced and moulded, the lower parts of the posts being carved with strap-work in low relief. The same heads, unpierced, occur at Park Hall, a cognate but rather simpler example.



NORTH-EAST ANGLE.