CANONS ASHBY,

NORTHANTS.

SOUTH of Daventry, where Northants marches with Oxfordshire and Warwickshire, stands, untouched since the day when the great poet was alive, the ancient home of the Drydens. In the middle of the sixteenth century John Dreyden came down from Cumberland to take up "his inheritance" at Canons Ashby. Of this inheritance, as he found it, not merely do the broad acres remain, but the tower and a large part of the house itself. To the building he found, he added much. The hall, though afterwards partly altered in the taste of the early eighteenth century, still retains its old doorways bearing the arms of the Drydens and of the Copes, John Dryden having married Elizabeth, daughter of Sir John Cope, who then owned lands in Canons Ashby formerly belonging to the monastery. These lands were in 1664-65 bought by Sir Robert Dryden and added to the Dryden estate. The marriage took place in 1551, and as much of John Drydem's work retains a touch of Gothic feeling, he is likely to have begun his additions and alterations early in his wedded career. In our illustration of the entrance front, the right-hand gable shows, in its upper storey, windows of Tudor date; but the main body of the house, which contains the hall, and the left-hand wing have the later mullioning of Elizabeth. On the ground floor evidence of the activity of the Dryden of Queen Anne's time appears in the sash windows. The south front was sashed between 1708 and 1710, and the greater part of the interior was redecorated to match. The drawing-room and staircase, however, escaped the "improving" spirit. The latter combines a trace of belated Gothic in the lower newel-post panel with a Jacobean arcaded panel above. Purely Jacobean in treatment and ornamentation is the drawing-room—and a fine specimen it is. But it is something of a survival in its style, being the work, it is said, of Sir John Dryden, certainly not earlier than 1632. The well-designed and executed chimney-piece reminds us of those which Sir John Bridgeman set up at Prinknash about 1630; but the Canons Ashby example has not quite the same refinement and restraint and has a somewhat earlier flavour, despite its later date. The three pairs of columns of the



THE COURTYARD ENTRANCE.



THE DRIVE IN.



THE OAK STAIRWAY.

upper section are insufficiently supported by the two single ones of equal girth of the lower section. The coved plaster ceiling is quite first-rate. Less heavy and assertive in the framing of its panels than the similar ceiling at Langleys, it has much more variety, elegance and charm in the filling of those panels—masks alternating with graceful conventional designs of thistles and pomegranates, culminating in a great pendant of boldly-moulded caryatides. Plaster-work of the same decorative scheme will be seen in the flat ceilings of the gallery at Aston and the drawing-room at Stockton.

Since the date of the Queen Anne alterations the renovating hand, with its highly destructive tendency, has been most strangely and happily absent at Canons Ashby. Unmodernised and unsmartened, it breathes the spirit of antiquity, and impresses the sentiment of perfect restfulness upon the visitor—of blue-blooded aloofness from the sordid whirl of the life and products of to-day.



THE DRAWING-ROOM.