JOHN LANGLEY'S HOUSE IN WELSHBACK, BRISTOL.

BRISTOL, its inhabitants proudly claim, can never be converted into a modern city, so royally did this city's forefathers spend their stores of wealth, gathered from far over-seas, in raising the picturesque piles that on all sides greet the eye of the visitor when first he traverses Broad Street.

The second seaport in England in its Elizabethan days, it, in common with all the West Country seaports, was to the fore whenever adventure called for sailors who would trade and traders who would fight ; and so successfully did her sons perform this double task, and especially on the Spanish Main, that to Bristol each ship brought back such wealth of all kinds and value as to call to mind that collected by Phœnician fleets for King Solomon. Inside, as well as out, they lavished money on the decoration of their houses, till no peer or Court favourite was more sumptuously lodged.

Later on, again, when younger sons were granted broad estates in fair Virginia, and trade began to flow backwards and forwards between that colony and the Old Country, it was to Bristol that much of it came, and gave a fresh stimulus to its career as a prosperous city and port. Not merely on themselves did these old-time merchant princes spend their gains ; but recognising the responsibility that ever comes with wealth, they saw to it that their children should have advantages that had perhaps been denied to themselves, and founded schools and charities that endure to this day.

Among the names of men whom Bristol delights to recall, stands out that of Sebastian Cabot, who, by landing in Newfoundland a full year before Columbus reached the mainland of the continent, practically forestalled, as Bristol men ever had a happy knack of doing, the Spaniard in his discovery of America.

In addition to their wealth, these early city fathers possessed a taste in architecture, in art and other matters, which was extraordinarily refined in its magnificence. Wherever communities of sixteenth century merchants existed, whether in England or abroad, the monuments they have left show them to have been cultured men in the truest sense of the word. They were generous and appreciative patrons of genius wherever they noted it, and for them were executed works that before their time had been deemed worthy of nothing less than a king's approval.

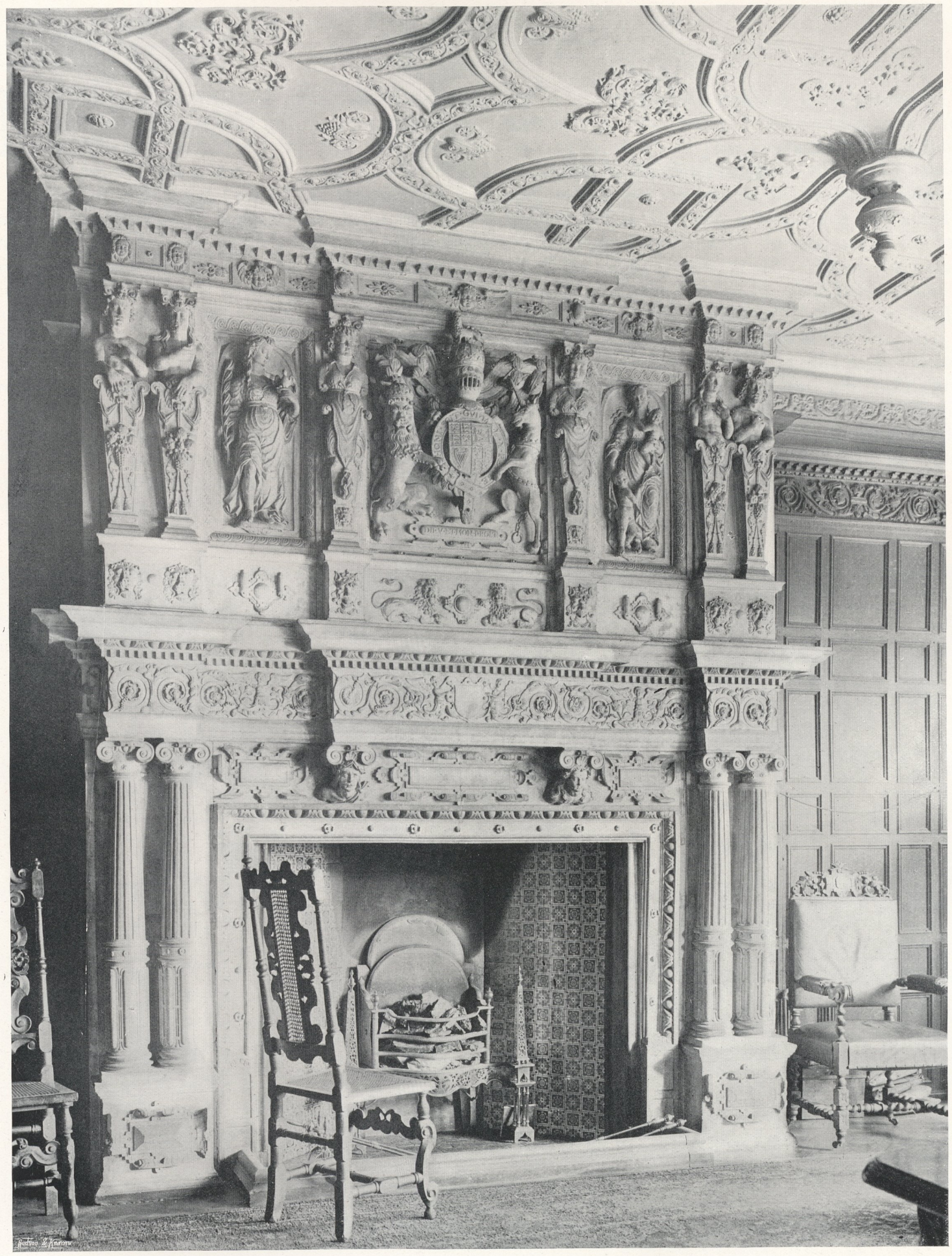
Of its mediæval merchants none were greater than the Canynges, whose house still in some part survives in Redcliff Street, its Gothic hall being a fine setting for the choice furniture of the antique dealers who now occupy it. Here the great merchant, who had four times been his city's mayor, and was a great benefactor and builder of the noble church of St. Mary close by, entertained Edward IV., his house then lying in the suburbs amid gardens, sloping to the river-side, where now are warehouses and quays. Of equal importance, but a century and a-half later in date, was John Langton, mayor in 1628, a member of the Soap Makers' Company, and builder of the splendidly finished house of which our illustrations show the great parlour. They will recall the drawing-room of another of Bristol's famous houses, the Red Lodge, which we pictured in the previous volume of this series. The ceilings and chimney-pieces of the two rooms are very similar, though, perhaps, John Langton's are the more rich and elaborate. This certainly applies to his doorway, which Mr. Gotch picked out for illustration and description as typical of the elaborate work of the period. "As a rule, the doorways were surrounded with a large amount of decoration. In important houses they were flanked with columns or pilasters, were surmounted with a frieze and cornice, and often with a pediment ; obelisks stood over the pilasters ; the frieze was fluted or carved, or adorned at intervals with heads ; some convenient panel was filled with the owner's arms ; nothing was omitted that an extravagant fancy could suggest."

This is by no means an exaggerated description of our Bristol merchant's door. Here the columns are inlaid with ivory and mother-o'-pearl, a statue of Justice occupies the main panel, heraldry appears in several places, and with it the initials J. L. and the date 1628. Another room had the date 1623, showing that so fine a house was, like Rome, not built in a day ; the staircase was fully proportionate, with ornamental balustrades and newels surmounted with heraldic lions. The street elevation was of timber-work, with overhanging storeys, fitted with oriels and roofed gablewise.



A DOORWAY.

The house with its fine fitments is no longer one of Bristol's glories. After long forming part of a tobacco factory, and suffering in consequence, despite the care of the owner, who was justly proud of it, it has ceased to be, and a new home for the honourable reception of this priceless interior work is being carefully and lovingly erected in Hampshire by Mr. E. L. Lutyens for Mrs. A. S. Franklyn.



THE GREAT FIREPLACE.