PRINKNASH PARK,

GLOUCESTERSHIRE.

THE venerable gabled house of Prinknash—the name has been written otherwise as Prinknesse, Prinknesche, or even Brinknash—is seated on a slope of the Cotswolds looking out towards the Severn, in a region of ancient wood; indeed, as Horace Walpole said, when he visited it, in August, 1774, "on a glorious but impracticable hill, in the midst of a little forest of beech, and commanding Elysium." The word is no exaggeration, for the outlook from the hill is full of historic interest, if we should read its moving chronicles, and great in its landscape beauty, with Gloucester itself in view, and prospects which fade into the enchantment of a sylvan distance. Here, in ancient days, the swine crunched the beech-mast in the broad wood known as Buckholt, which extended far on either side, and still the great columnar trees are the memorial of the days when the hunter's horn resounded in the glades. The place was long a manor of the powerful abbey of St. Peter of Gloucester, through the grant of Osbern Giffard and others. "Prinknash," we may read in the chronicle of Abbot Frocester, "extends as far as the beech, where the robber was hanged, between the King and Edgar de Kenemesbury and ourselves." Britons and Romans have left evidences of their occupation hereabout, and the ancient Trackway which ran down from the camp on High Broadridge still forms the boundary of the park. The possessions of the abbey in this neighbourhood were extended by subsequent grants, and the place was made extra parochial in 1397. It has now attained to the dignity of becoming a parish all to itself, containing some three or four houses only.

The surmise appears reasonable that a hunting-lodge was built at Prinknash soon after



THE WEST FRONT.

1355, when a grant of free warren was made, and some parts of the existing house may even go back to that time, or to a date not much later. Tradition says that Abbot Parker, otherwise Malvern — 1514-39, the last Abbot of Gloucester—first made use of Prinknash as a residence. Certainly the evidences of his work are upon it, notably the spandrel of a square-headed Tudor doorway with the initials W. M., a pastoral staff, a tassel, and fleur-de-lys; but there had been a house upon the site in earlier times, which had probably been occupied by the woodward, the holders of that office having been relations of successive Abbots of Gloucester. But the first distinct mention of Prinknash as a residence of the Abbot was in 1526, when one John Bayley was ordered to carry fuel for the Abbot's fire.



IN THE LIBRARY.



THE DRAWING-ROOM CHIMNEY-PIECE.

The date of the building or enlargement of the house as it stands has been given as 1520-25, which accords with the style; and the south-western portion, the drawing-room, kitchen and pantry belong to that period. Although modernised in some respects, and with sash windows in a part of the west front, the style is generally that of the Late Perpendicular as applied to domestic architecture. The oriel in the library, with its pendants and fan tracery, is a fine example of Abbot Parker's work. It is also worthy of note that the centre-piece in the ceiling of the dining-hall has a Tudor rose, with the falcon and fetter-lock, being the badge of the House of York; and it has been surmised that Elizabeth of York, Queen of Henry VII., lodged at Prinknash on her progress through Gloucestershire in 1502. There is exceedingly interesting glass of the period in the drawing-room, showing the arms of Henry VIII. and of the Abbot. The King almost certainly visited him at Prinknash in 1535; but his coming was the prelude of the Dissolution and spoliation that came about five years later. In the courtyard, sculptured in relief on the south-east wall, there is a figure-head of Henry, probably commemorative of his visit. The abbey and all its possessions passed into the King's hands, but Abbot Parker, though unable to avert the doom of his house, could never be brought to sign the fatal surrender. Horace Walpole, who often visited Prinknash, mentions the ancient chapel, "which is low and small, but antique, and with painted glass with angels in their coronation robes, wings and crowns." He also mentions the communion plate, which, curiously enough, bore his family arms.



WINDOW IN LIBRARY.

Prinknash was not immediately disposed of, but was let for a period to Sir Anthony Kingston, who, with his father, had been steward of the abbey, and shared in the spoliation. He was a notorious personage in his time, and his name is held in evil repute in Cornwall for the exceeding cruelty with which he suppressed the rebellion in 1549. Kingston was implicated in the plot to marry the Princess Elizabeth to the Earl of Devon, but cheated the scaffold by committing suicide. This, however, was long after he had had anything to do with Prinknash, which, in the year 1544, was granted to Edmund Brydges, son of Sir John Brydges, afterwards Lord Chandos of Sudeley, and to the affianced bride of the same Edmund, Dorothy, daughter of the Lord Bray. The grant was of the "capital messuage" or mansion, with the gardens, orchards and pond within the park, as well as the park itself, and the buildings, mills, garden, fish-ponds, woods and all rights and privileges, rendering a rent of 10s. yearly to the King. Doubtless the favour shown to Edmund Brydges and to Dorothy Bray was owing partly to the services and merits of their parents, for Sir John Brydges had greatly distinguished himself at the Battle of the Spurs and in the defence of Boulogne, and the Brays had made themselves the trusty counsellors of the King. Edmund was made a knight banneret at Roxburgh in 1547, but before that time he had been Lieutenant of the Tower, and he succeeded his father as Lord Chandos of Sudeley in 1557, being made later on a Knight of the Garter.

During his time a great deal was done to improve the house at Prinknash, and there remain shields of Henry VIII., Prince Edward, Seymour with many quarterings, Brydges and Bray, which belong to the period. The glass may be ascribed to about the year 1546, when Edmund Brydges and his wife were living at Prinknash. Later on they made Sudeley their residence, and Prinknash became a dower house, though it was occasionally used by the Lords Chandos when they visited Gloucester. There seems to have been some doubt as to the precise ownership of the place in the beginning of the seventeenth century; but the fifth Lord Chandos obtained the reversion from the King, and in 1628 sold the whole property to Sir John Bridgeman, Recorder of Gloucester, and his son George Bridgeman. The new owner was born in 1567, was a distinguished lawyer in his time, and married the sister and reputed heiress of Giles Daunt of Owlpen, near Dursley, in the same county. He was knighted in 1623, and as Chief Justice of Cheshire and Counsellor in Ordinary he took a conspicuous part in the affairs of Wales and Gloucestershire, and being made Recorder of the City in 1628, he found Prinknash a convenient residence. He was a busy man, and was greatly concerned in the

trial of riotous persons who objected to the sale and enclosure of parts of the Forest of Dean. He also held assizes on questions relating to ship money, and is reputed to have been so severe that one who had suffered by his sentence wrote an epitaph upon him :

> Here lies Sir John Bridgeman, clad in his clay,
> God said to the devil, "Sirrah, take him away."

It was a hard saying, and perhaps was not deserved by its subject. Sir John Bridgeman left his mark upon Prinknash, which he improved to his mind. The chapel was consecrated in his time, and he adorned the drawing-room with the beautiful and characteristic chimney-piece which is illustrated. It is a fine example of work in stone below, and of wood above. There are coupled Corinthian columns in two stages, and above the fireplace, in thin wreaths of delicately carved bay leaves and berries, are three shields with the many quarterings of Bridgeman, Woodward and Daunt of Owlpen. The whole work is very characteristic of the period, as is also the notable mantel-piece in the library. The upper part of it has a curious sculptured panel, seeming to show Equity and Justice supporting the world, with an intervening figure holding a garment, which is apparently to be divided by the sword.

George Bridgeman succeeded his father in possession of Prinknash, and was apparently at one time closely identified with the Puritan party at Gloucester. The leaders there, at any rate, hoped to gain his assistance. It will be remembered that after the death of Hampden, when the Royalist cause was in the ascendant, Gloucester interrupted the communications between Bristol and the North, for which reason Charles laid siege to it ; but the place held out stoutly, and he was obliged to raise the siege when Essex approached. The city authorities at Gloucester had issued a commission to George Bridgeman to prevent soldiers being levied for the King, to seize upon horses, arms, ammunition, plate, or provisions intended for the Royal service, to be ready to assist the Earl of Essex, and, finally, "to fight with, kill and slay" all who should by force oppose him. But George Bridgeman thought discretion the better part of valour, and considered it prudent to retire and to separate himself from his friends. It was expected that the King would lodge at Prinknash, and everything was made ready ; but he stayed himself at Matson House during the siege, though some of his chief officers were undoubtedly at Prinknash.

The estate remained in the Bridgeman family until 1770, when it was sold ; and in 1776 it came into the possession of Mr. John Howell, who was succeeded as owner by his son, Mr. Thomas Bayley Howell, father of Mr. T. J. Howell, Judge Advocate of the Forces and Judge of the Vice-Admiral's Court at Gibraltar. The latter gentleman did something to relieve the house of incongruities. He likewise improved the grounds and plantations, making the surroundings more attractive ; but in 1847 he sold the estate to Mr. James Ackers, M.P. for Ludlow, who restored and beautified the chapel, and otherwise did much to the house, the work being carried on by his son and successor, Mr. Benjamin St. John Ackers. The estate again changed hands in 1887, when it was sold to the present owner, Mr. Dyer Edwardes, late of Waverley Court, Camberley, Surrey, and through his care the house has been invested with the finished charm which now distinguishes it.

As to Abbot Parker we may add that he declined to acknowledge the King as head of the Church, and consequently had to fly for his life. Tradition says he took refuge at his brother's manor, situated at Notgrove, an inaccessible hamlet on the Cotswolds, until the King's wrath abated ; that he was offered the first Bishopric of Gloucester, but died on his way down, and was buried at Notgrove. An old stone slab, with the remains of a mutilated figure and pastoral staff, seems to give credence to the story.