WELBECK ABBEY,

NOTTINGHAMSHIRE.

IN the year 1654 John Evelyn of Wotton and his wife, travelling about England in handsome and leisurely fashion, came to Welbeck, "the house of the Marques of Newcastle, seated in a botome in a park and environ'd with woods, a noble yet melancholy seate." In some such words we might still describe Welbeck Abbey, still the seat of the descendants of the Evelyns' Marquess. Like Woburn, another abbatial house of another English duke, Welbeck lies low, a building site chosen by religious men who asked retirement and shelter; but if the low site by the water-side be melancholy, let us remember that the park which rings it round, a vast deer park with eight miles of boundary, is the merry green-wood of Robin Hood's forest of Sherwood. That its land is poor for the ploughman has its compensations; its wild poverty has saved to England a broad piece of one of those forests which once ran from sea to sea.



DINING-ROOM LOBBY.

The house's name tells its history This Welbeck was once an abbey, an offshoot merely from Newhouse, but was the chief house of the Premonstratensian order in England when Henry VIII. dissolved the abbeys. Welbeck shared the common lot, and its site was bought by one Richard Whalley. From the Whalleys it passed by purchase to Sir Charles Cavendish, who at the beginning of the reign of James I. began to pull down the old walls and change a house of religious into a seat for the dukes who were to come of his loins.

Sir Charles Cavendish was a younger son of Bess of Hardwicke, whose ancestral home of Hardwick is less than ten miles from Welbeck, over the county border. By her second marriage, this famous lady, who was four times a wife, and



PART OF THE DINING-ROOM.



THE RED WITHDRAWING-ROOM: NORTH END.

long outlived her fourth husband, had two sons who founded ducal houses, the Duke of Devonshire descending from an elder brother of Sir Charles. His mother's passion for building must have taken Sir Charles Cavendish, for in his time not only, as we have seen, was Bolsover built, but the ancient abbey and abbey church of Welbeck disappeared into his new work. Legend has it that even now the tombs of the abbey church remain, that the effigies of the Cuckneys, who founded it, and of the sleeping abbots clad in stone still lie boxed in some forgotten place, behind walls or masking panels, within this mass of buildings.

By his wife Catherine, the heir of the Northumberland Ogles, Sir Charles begat William Cavendish, a successful courtier at a time when the Court offered a great career for a well-born young man of good presence. While still a lad, he was created Knight of the Bath, and in 1619 King James honoured Welbeck with one of his costly visits, the host becoming Viscount Mansfield before the next year's end. Eight years afterwards he was Earl of Newcastle, and the Ogle estates falling to his hand, he was able in 1633 to spend between £4,000 and £5,000 in entertaining the new King at Welbeck. For this occasion Ben Jonson composed his masque entitled "The King's Entertainment at Welbeck." In the following year the King (accompanied by Queen Henrietta Maria) was again entertained at Welbeck, and thence moved on to Bolsover. The cost of these visits was nearly £15,000. Newcastle was named governor to the young Prince of Wales, and places and pensions were coming to his hands when the wars began, and all his gains were in peril. He commanded in the North, and at his own charges raised troops which he led into Yorkshire. By the fight at Adwalton he won Yorkshire for the King, and in 1643 he had the barren honour of changing his earldom for a marquessate. After Marston Moor, where he fought as a simple volunteer, having vainly urged Rupert to wait for reinforcements, he washed his hands of civil war and went over-sea to Hamburg, where began sixteen years of wandering exile In exile he met and married his second wife, Margaret Lucas, sister of the Sir Charles Lucas who died for his defence of Colchester, her jewels being pawned for their household need. In exile, too, he wrote his famous book on the *manège*, he being the great horse-master of his day. At the Restoration they came home again to find themselves an old and fantastic couple in a Court which mocked behind their backs. He had spent, by his own showing, a million in the Royal cause, and his estates were never wholly restored. As Duke and Duchess of Newcastle, the husband and wife withdrew to their old home at Welbeck, where they might solace themselves with the interminable plays, verses and essays which set them among Walpole's "noble authors." The second Duke, who died at Welbeck in 1691, saw his son, the Lord Ogle,



ON THE WEST WALL: RED WITHDRAWING-ROOM.

die in his own lifetime, and was succeeded by his five daughters and co-heirs, of whom Margaret, the third daughter, was wife to John Holles, Earl of Clare, in whom the ducal title of Newcastle was revived. Their only daughter became the wife of Edward Harley, second Earl of Oxford, and friend of Pope and Swift. The Earl's only surviving child was Lady Margaret Cavendish Harley, through whose marriage with the second Duke of Portland the Welbeck estates have descended to the Bentincks.

Ginkels, Keppels, Nassau-Zulesteins and Bentincks mark for our peerage the age in which William of Orange came over to preserve the liberties of a nation which gave him but grudging gratitude. All obtained earldoms, two of which are extinct, but the Keppels still hold that of Albemarle and the Bentincks have



SOUTH WALL OF THE RED WITHDRAWING-ROOM.

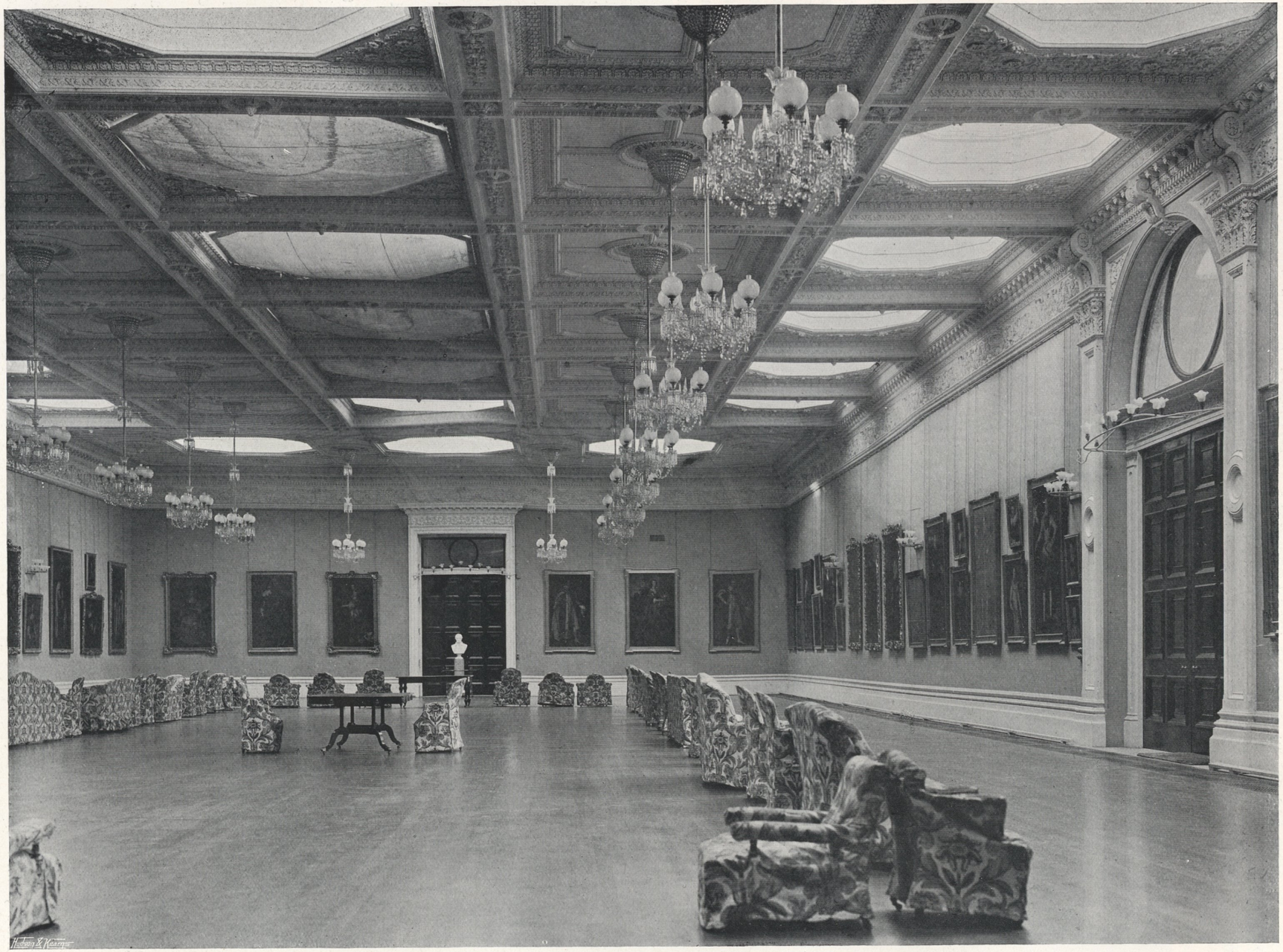


THE CHAPEL.

climbed higher, their marriages having set them among the great governing families of the country. Our first Bentinck might thank his handsome face for his first advancement. He became page to the Prince of Orange, and gentleman of his bedchamber, "the best servant I have known in princes' or private families," wrote Sir William Temple, to whom Bentinck's master told the tale of how when at death's door with small-pox "in sixteen days and nights he never called once that he was not answered by Monsieur Bentinck as if he had been awake." Bentinck had no quality of a great statesman, but he was loyal and steadfast. Our envious countrymen saw a Dutchman's boorishness in his carriage, but the courtiers of the Grand Monarque, no mean judges of a gallant gentleman, had nothing but admiration for the ambassador whose splendid equipage recalled the cloth of gold embassy of Buckingham. As a soldier he showed a Dutchman's stolid courage, riding beside his King at the Boyne Water with the Dutch horse guards, and at Landen, where one ball cut a curl off the King's peruke, another pierced his broad sleeve, and a third grazed his side. His rewards were rich and many, a grant of the Royal house and demesnes of Theobalds being made to him after the jealous Commons had protested against a vast endowment of Welsh lands. For his first wife he had Anne Villiers, a cousin of another ducal



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THE GREAT BALLROOM.

family founded by a handsome page, and, like her husband, one of the household of Orange, being a maid of honour to the Princess Mary. At the rise of Keppel as Court favourite the Earl of Portland, "cold and dry . . . who seemed to have the art of creating many enemies to himself and not one friend," withdrew himself from the Court; but when William lay gasping in asthma upon his death-bed it was for his old servant Portland that he asked with his last spoken word, and he died with Portland at his bedside. In the next generation the Earldom of Portland became a dukedom for Henry Bentinck, who died Captain-General and Governor of Jamaica, and the Welbeck estates came in by the marriage of the second Duke with the Lady Margaret Cavendish Harley. The third Duke was Prime Minister in 1783 and 1807, joining Pitt's Administration in the days of the French Revolution; and the sixth Duke, now lord of Welbeck, is his great-grandson. The house of Welbeck Abbey has been a-making in various styles since its Cavendish owner began his work upon it in the reign of James I., building in some part of the old structure of the abbots of Welbeck. It is a sombre pile, massive and ugly in many styles. The west front has battled parapets, and a great square tower from which the Duke may display his banner, while the east front, rising from a broad terrace over the lawns towards the lake, has a gabled roof. The south front has for its ideal the Italian villa into which so many great English homes have changed themselves. The interior affords evidence of three centuries of changing taste. The dining-room reflects the age of Bess's son and grandson. The Swan Drawing-room displays in its mantel, where Europeanised Chinamen clamber and sit amid pagodas and bells, branches and foliage, columns and *lambrequins*, the utmost elaboration and wildness of Chippendalian design. The Red Drawing-room belongs to the close of the eighteenth century, and is a most admirable example of its finest products. The ceiling painting reminds us of the brush of Angelica Kaufmann, the wood and plaster work breathes the chastened spirit of the brothers Adam, the furniture is worthy of the Versailles of Louis XVI. and Marie Antoinette, and the tapestries that decorate the walls are of the Gobelins factory at its best. The whole of the room is coeval and entirely harmonious. As much cannot be said for the "Gothic Hall," whose mean chimney-piece topped by choir-stall canopies, and whose clumsy ceiling rotundities, simulating solid stone vaulting of the fan tracery type — but really of stucco upon basket-work foundation —are triumphs of Strawberry Hill mediævalism, and are only interesting as giving an



THE GOTHIC HALL.

example of an even pre-Walpolian Gothic "revival," for the Countess of Oxford had this work done about the middle years of the eighteenth century. Many additions were made by the late Duke, the most curious being the subterranean tunnels which run in all directions, and the large rooms constructed underground. Through one tunnel is reached a riding school, 385ft. long and 112ft. wide. The great ballroom, unfinished at his death, is seen in one of our pictures, with its wonderful floor of polished oak, and its walls now hung with several scores of old paintings.

The stables are among the most remarkable in the kingdom, as befits the house of one who has been twice Master of the Horse, the descendant of that mirror of horse-masters, the Duke of Newcastle, and here a hundred horses may have their stalls. The present Duke's winnings upon the Turf are not far away, in the shape of a row of almshouses.

But the contents of Welbeck are more remarkable than the house. The pictures, and above all the portraits by old English and foreign masters, are as notable for their number as their quality. Here is a famous Queen Elizabeth of Mark Gheeraedts, and here, in the dining-room, is that wonderful Van Dyck, the boy Charles, Prince of Wales, which was last seen in London among the Royal portraits at the New Gallery. A brown and round-faced boy, with straight hair falling upon his forehead, Charles is painted in half armour, the tasses meeting riding boots of soft leather. On a mass of stone at his left hand rests his helmet with red and white plumes, and the beautiful hands of the boy play with the wheel-lock of a pistol. The boyhood of the elder Charles is recorded here also by the sad face over a ruff of a child in long skirts of green velvet, a child carrying a little dag or gun, his greyhound running beside him. Here is the first of the Portlands, a somewhat hard-faced Kneller, a contrast with the triumphant male beauty of the portrait which Hyacinthe Rigaud painted of the popular peace envoy. Our picture shows the Reynolds portrait of the third Duke, a Georgian statesman, seated before his papers, in velvet coat, white stockings and little wig, his lace-ruffled hand at his chin.

The many lines of heirs which have met in the house of Portland explain this gathering of Holbein, Janssen and Mytens, Van Dyck, Lely and Kneller, Dahl and Richardson, Reynolds and Gainsborough, West and Lawrence. Portraits of Noels and Wriothesleys came in by the first Duke's marriage. Harleys, Cavendishes and Holleses are here through the second Duke's match. Beside these are Talbots and Veres, Pierreponts and Villierses, the last including a portrait of George Villiers, the favourite, painted



THE SWAN WITHDRAWING-ROOM.

when a beardless lad. In our picture of the dining-room, Van Dyck's picture of Strafford in his armour, booted and spurred, lowering brows and keen face over a plain white collar, is flanked on the other side of the mantel-piece by another Van Dyck, the portrait of the Duke of Newcastle, all cavalier, from the love-lock on his left shoulder to his rosetted shoes—the splendid founder of Welbeck as a lordly palace, and of Welbeck's owners as an almost princely house.