CLOUDS,

SALISBURY.

CLOUDS is one of the most interesting of our great modern dwellings ; interesting in its position, set as it is on the wooded edge of the Wiltshire Downs, over 600ft. above the sea ; interesting in its name, an ancient one, though the house is new. The Knoyle estate was bought by the Hon. Percy Wyndham, at that time member for West Cumberland, in 1876, a large tract of downland overlooking the Blackmoor Vale to the south-west, and bounded to the south-east by the Fonthill Woods, of which Clouds, with its great trees, is, as it were, the continuation and crown. In the eighteenth century it belonged to a family of the name of Still, who were intimate with Beckford, the celebrated author of "Vathek" and owner of Fonthill, and it is said that the planting round the house and in the park was done under his direction ; but when Mr. Wyndham bought it it had already passed to the Seymours of Knoyle, and formed the most beautiful part of their domain.

The site is one pointed out by Nature for a fine abode. It stands overlooking the wide wooded valley of Knoyle, and yet screened from the south-westerly gales by still higher slopes of rising ground ; and it required but little spade-work to give it the full space needed for the present house and grounds. The plan of these is a very generous one, both in its main



THE EAST FRONT.

design and, above all, in its inner details, which are probably the most thoroughly thought out of those of any house in England, its architect being the most conscientious of house-builders, Mr. Philip Webb, and Clouds the crowning labour of his life.



THE WEST FRONT.

Mr. Webb's position as an architect needs here some word of definition. It is, of course, unnecessary to say that he stands in the first rank of his profession. His name though it has never been prominently before the world with any great public construction, is one reverenced by the craft and worshipped by not a few of the best architects of the rising generation. He was for years the intimate friend of Morris, Rossetti and Burne-Jones, and it was to him that Morris came for the design of the Red House he built on Bexley Heath in 1859. This was at the time a quite heroic innovation, for it was absolutely the first attempt in an age of stucco and slate roofings to return to the plain brickwork, uncoated either with paint or plaster, and the tiles of earlier times. These are the commonplaces of our domestic architecture now; but then it needed a courage not to be



THE SOUTH-EAST CORNER.



FROM MRS. WYNDHAM'S DRESSING-ROOM.

found outside the narrow circle of the pre-Raphaelite brotherhood to build anything but a square box of such materials. Webb's design was fanciful and elaborate, and of a conscientious solidity then unknown to builders; and the first impulse, therefore, of all our modern house architecture in England is justly ascribed, by those who know, to Philip Webb. The Red House was his earliest creation; Clouds, if not the latest, was his most complete; and it is beyond a doubt that it is on the recognition of its super-excellence as a type of the best Victorian architecture that his ultimate fame will rest.

We do not propose to attempt any elaborate description of the exterior of the house, for that is sufficiently given by the photographs. Its material is the green sandstone quarried in the neighbourhood. This is employed for the first and second storeys, while the third or attic floor is of brick with a tiled roof. Its interior, however, needs a word of more praise than the



THE HALL.



STAIRCASE DESCENT, WEST CORRIDOR.

photographs can give, and it is only in the power of those who, like the writer of this monograph, have been inmates under its roof, and who have experienced its many liveable qualities, to make known a tithe of these. The living-rooms are models of dignified simplicity, a little plain maybe, according to our ideas of modern ornament, but of that exact proportion which is in itself the greatest and purest pleasure to the eye a room can give. Nor even in the hall, where structural effect is most conspicuous, is there anything aggressive or of a character to compel attention. The woodwork is chiefly of plain, unpolished oak, and the walls are white throughout, and the impression given is only not one of bareness because of the fine plaster-work which enriches frieze and ceiling. This is the truest decoration of a house if one is not to weary of its beauty, and there is a certain parsimony of colours which more than any paint is an enrichment to the eye. There are very few curtains, and those chiefly Morris tapestries of various blues, the hangings in the drawing-room being simply white. There is



THE DRAWING-ROOM.



THE MORNING ROOM.



THE NORTH END OF THE CORRIDOR.



PART OF THE DINING-ROOM.

no elaboration either of design or contrast, and the Morris carpets are the only luxury of colour. This wise austerity is a notable and very noble feature of the house, as viewed for the first time. To one who comes to know it better, the detail of its decoration throughout, even to the attics, is wonderfully beautiful and complete. The vaulted corridors on the first landing round the central hall suggest a convent cloister, though bright and cheerful and full of light. The chief bedrooms all open out of this corridor, and in our opinion are perfect in form, decoration and above all in comfort and convenience. Here the architect's infinite ingenuity and patience seems to have spent itself with a prodigality of care everywhere apparent. It accounts for the

six years devoted by him to the building of the house, a long labour of love which occupied him wholly, to the exclusion of all other work.

A word or two about the gardens, which, like all the rest of Clouds, have a character of their own, suggestive of dignity rather than pretence. On the east side the garden is formal, enclosed by yew hedges, the design of which was given by Mr. Alfred Parsons. A garden to be enjoyable should not, we think, be any larger than its owner's mind; we mean that it should be possible for its owner to know personally each bush and tree and flower, and understand their individual wants. Where flowers are multiplied beyond this point, they become of no more interest than so many flocks of sheep, objects, it may be, of pride, but no longer of pleasure, to their owner. Nothing of this ostentatious kind is noticeable at Clouds; here, not a rose blossoms but with the owner's knowledge, not a lily withers but to the owner's grief. Mrs. Wyndham lives in intimate sympathy with all, and orders all daily for their good. The small inner garden, with its old Wiltshire straw-thatched wall, has been kept intact, and is filled with spring flowers, bulbs, cyclamens and magnolias. It is much valued by the owners as giving a certain character that connects the new with the old, and which was never overlooked by the architect, who brought the house into wonderful unison with its old surroundings. The house had not long been completed when, in January, 1889, it was burnt to the ground; but it was rebuilt and reoccupied within three years of its destruction, on the exact lines of the original plan.



A PORTION OF THE WEST FRONT.