MARSH COURT,

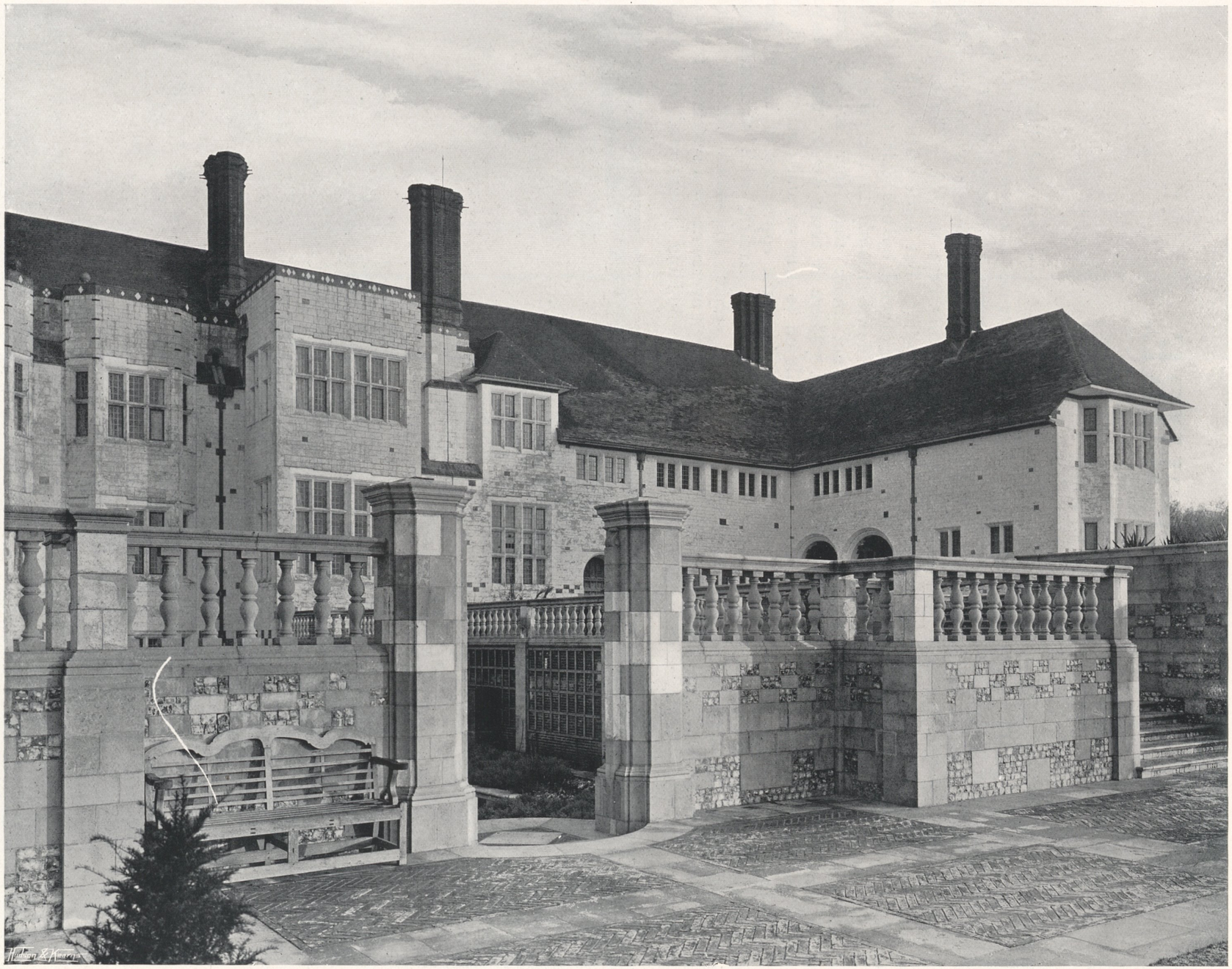
HAMPSHIRE.

THE road from Stockbridge to Marshcourt, leading through the reedy, flat water-meadows that fringe the Test, with large, silvery willows dotted over them, and beds of fragrant meadow-sweet bordering the way, is extremely pretty, but it scarcely promises a fine site for a building. There is an entire absence of bold features, and the slopes enclosing the valley are low and undulating. By and by, however, a spur of hill on our left detaches itself, and juts forward into the valley. It is not much more than a knoll, but in this country of low curves and horizontal lines it tells with some boldness, and it commands a fine view. On this stands the house, its tall tile gables and a portion of its white walls, with mullioned windows, visible from the road below, backed closely by a dense oak wood on the further side.

Before attempting a description of the house, we will explain the manner in which the rather peculiar site has been utilised. The projection of hill is itself of but small extent. Probably from the oak wood on one side to the slopes that break down abruptly to the valley on the other is not more than four or five acres altogether. There is every danger that a large house built on so narrow and circumscribed an area might have the appearance of having been dumped down at hazard, with an insufficient natural and scenic preparation for it. This danger has been overcome by a system of terraces by which the building is supported, and which



THE LOGGIA.



THE SOUTH TERRACE.



THE STAIRCASE.



THE HALL, LOOKING WEST.



THE HALL, LOOKING EAST.

themselves constitute a work of architectural significance. They occupy all the space between the house itself and the edge of the descent, and, however insignificant this space might seem if laid out in ordinary gardens, it assumes dignified proportions enough when arranged in ordered terraces on different levels, with flights



ASCENT TO FISHING ROOM.

of steps leading from one to the other, little lawns of green turf set in stone, borders of brilliant flowers, and pergolas, and sundials, and graceful balustrades in storeys, rising one above the other. So utilised, the site, though small, achieves a dignity, even a stateliness, of its own; and the walls of the building, which would seem absurd and irrelevant if they stood on the natural slope of the knoll, rise



AN UPPER STAIRWAY.

appropriately enough out of a rich setting of stone, which has carried the influence of the architecture into surrounding Nature until the very hill itself on which the building stands seems to have entered into the architect's designs.

It is usually the case that, when a thing is well set off, it is worth setting off well; for the same knowledge of effect will guide a man both in the creation of his work of art and in the placing and displaying of it, and certainly Marshcourt deserves its fine setting and can justify it. As to the style in which it is built, it may in its essentials be described as English of the sixteenth century. It admits, no doubt, a good many motives and ideas of other times and nations. The Renascence has affected it considerably. There is a hint or



STAIRCASE FROM BILLIARD-ROOM.



THE BILLIARD-ROOM.

two of Dutch influence, and the ceiling of one vast bedroom, at least, is decorated with bands of pure Byzantine design. But these are the merest details. The spirit of the whole is the spirit of English sixteenth century work, of Tudor, that is to say, and Elizabethan. If the reader will glance at the photographs which accompany this description he will easily perceive why on this point it is possible to speak with confidence. What we get, in all the rooms and walls and windows and chimney-pieces and stairs and ceilings of Marshcourt, is the sixteenth century massiveness, directness and strength, the sixteenth century love of natural contrasts and plain effects and native material. The hall is the only room in which the Jacobean influence assumes any real importance. There, what with the clusters of Doric columns supporting the archway, the fluted



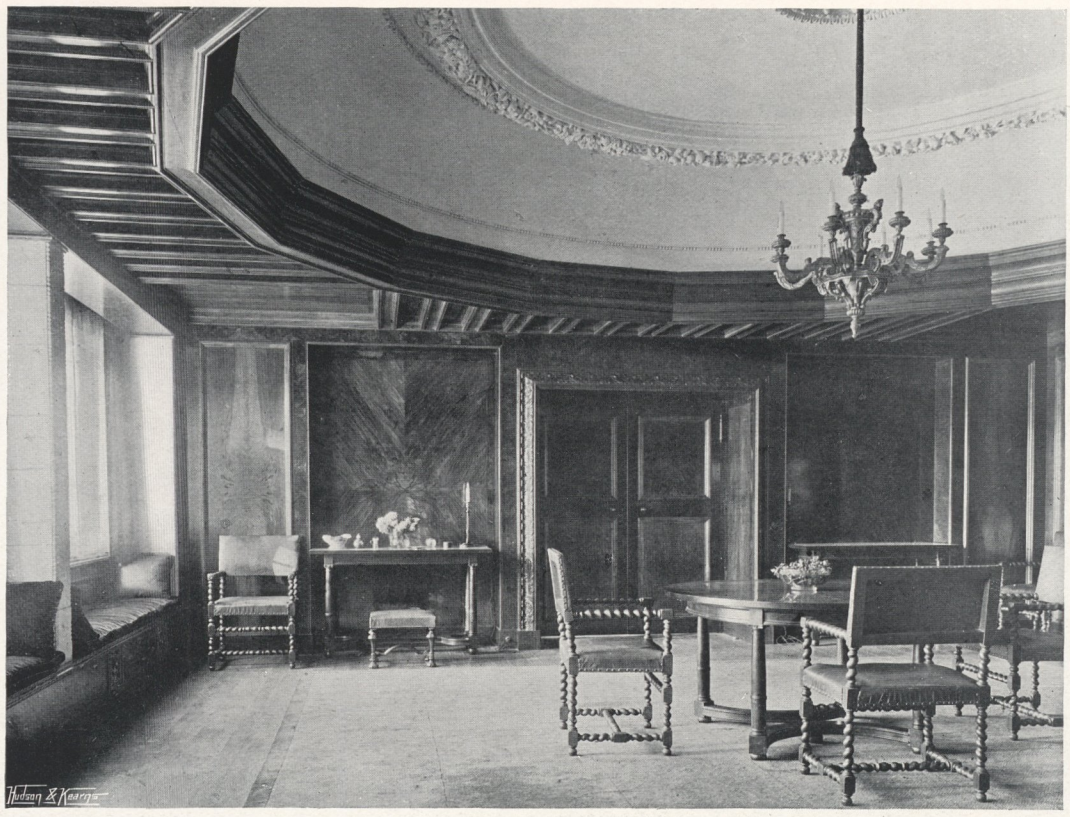
THE HALL SCREEN.



CORRIDOR, FIRST FLOOR.

pilasters with their Corinthian capitals and the classic entablature running round the room, it certainly is of importance. Yet even there the massiveness of treatment and plainness of oak panelling counteract the classic effect, and as we advance up the hall and open up the panelled wall and tall mullioned window on our left, as is well shown in one of the photographs, the impression of Tudor massiveness and plainness resumes its sway.

And this is the impression that goes with one from room to room. In the passages, staircases and galleries this plainness and massiveness of treatment are conspicuous. There is nowhere a trace of the Renascence ostentation, of the Renascence love of pomp for pomp's



DINING-ROOM.

sake, of the Renascence arrogance and exclusiveness. Much as we are all indebted, no doubt, to the refinement and the keen perception of effect which the early Renascence developed, it will not be denied that the coming of the Renascence deprived us of a good deal that had value. It deprived us of that home-grown, native art which was in some respects rude, perhaps, but which was at least forcible and direct in all its methods and entirely honest and sincere in its convictions. It is the main attraction, as it seems to us, of Mr. Lutyens' work that he has attempted to revive these methods and these ideals. We are never very far from humbug and pretence when we lose touch of native character, native scenery and native material, and to regain touch with those things means invariably to regain a strength and certainty of treatment and the capacity for making plain things tell. The reader, from the accompanying photographs, will easily identify these qualities in the architecture of Marshcourt. He will feel how absolutely familiar and English it all is, and at the same time he will feel how simple and telling is the effect. The truth is, the two go together.



THE DRAWING-ROOM.

Architecture is essentially a national art ; and though a certain refinement may be learnt by independent thought and foreign study, yet the main structural forms and features must, if the art is to retain, or regain, strength and simplicity, be of native growth and origin, and Mr. Lutyens' work has the merit of being thoroughly English.

As regards the decoration, the reader should pay particular attention to the hall, of which there are no fewer than three photographs, as well as to the one each of the drawing-room and billiard-room. The most prominent features of structural decoration in the hall are the two massy panels in white chalk, here again the rule that when you see a thing well set off, it is worth setting off well, holds. The quality of the carving is wonderfully fine, as may quite well be seen in the illustrations. The reader may well take a magnifying glass and look into the extreme tendrils to left and right of each panel ; they are the same as those carved in wood over the drawing-room fireplace, and it is a pleasure to find that there exist in England to-day workmen who can do such work. It will be noticed that over the garlands of flowers are clusters of reed ends, such as grow by the acre in the water-meadows you see from the windows. Mr. Lutyens took a particular interest in working into his



ENTRANCE HALL.

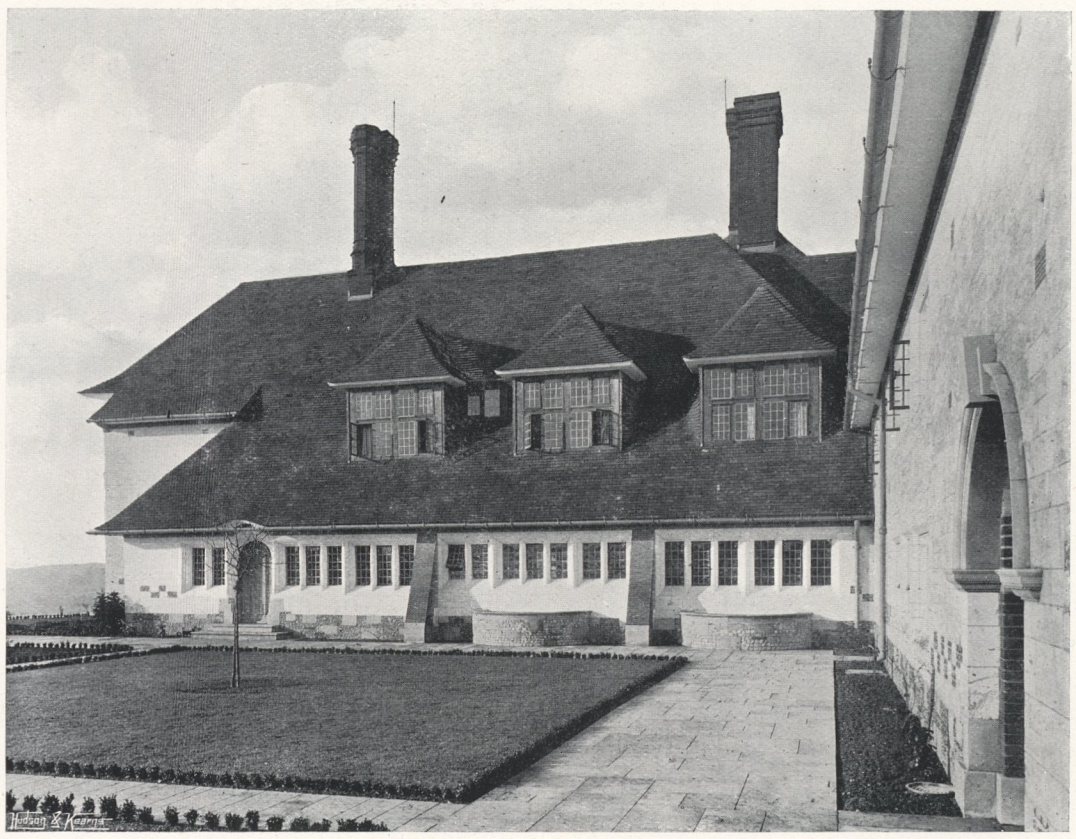
sculptured with garlands, that cross the room at either end, having white angle-pilasters prepared for their special reception. Chalk is the building material used throughout the house, and not only is it used for the walls, but for many of the more decorative portions as well. The whole building is, in fact, an illustration of the virtues of chalk ; but these two hall panels may be taken as a kind of culminating honour and compliment paid to it, showing off as they do, with deliberate and unmistakable emphasis, the richness of its texture and its high decorative capability. These pure white panels, inlaid in the natural grey of the oak wainscoting, claim a decided and immediate attention. But designs the plants and flowers of the neighbourhood, a fact which is worth mentioning as bearing out the plea of the entirely national character of his work.

Whether, however, the architect has acted wisely in decorating the ceilings of all his downstair rooms with their present heavy sculptured wreaths is not so certain. For not only is there a certain monotony in passing from room to room, and finding in each case the chief attention directed to the same feature, but, when this feature is the ceiling, which it is naturally not very easy to look at, the effect is the more uncomfortable. Moreover, the sculpture itself is rich rather than clear in design,

which makes it the harder to decipher. Apart from this the decoration and treatment generally of the whole interior shows such restrained and careful taste that it is a pleasure to sit and study each separate room and wall and doorway and fireplace. Much use is made of brickwork and of thin Roman tiles, which are used both structurally and, in herring-bone patterns, decoratively. The effect is always admirable, and perfectly in keeping with the robust and virile character of the architecture. There is a complete absence of, what one meets with so frequently in modern work, an over-anxious and ingenious originality. The architect's solicitude and care has been extended to every detail, to the setting of every stone. It would be true to say that every square foot of the building has been the object of his strict consideration. But it is only after attentive study on your own part that you find this out. The effect of the whole is simple to plainness; but look close, and in the finish of every detail, and even in the setting of the courses of the masonry, you will note indications of patient thought and a knowledge how to extract the best results from the simplest means.

The arts and crafts are, as we know, inseparably linked together, and decline or flourish in unison. But the position of architecture in the group is peculiar. It is not so much one among several activities as a framework or setting within which the rest find their allotted places and functions, and in obeying the main purpose of which they achieve unity. Thus architecture has always struck the keynote of artistic enterprise. The refinement and magnificence of eighteenth century classic architecture, combined with the utter lack in it of any popular or national sentiment, are qualities which are carried down through every degree of craftsmanship, and mark the whole artistic movement of that day as merely a class movement, while in the same way the national vigour embodied in Gothic architecture gives character to every atom of the industrial work of the time. Architecture, in short, is our gauge and standard of artistic vitality, and it is therefore a matter of much interest and significance to watch, as we may in these days, the gradual rise of a style which, in its plainness and simplicity, its strength and sincerity, reveals something of a genuinely national character. It is impossible not to be struck by the resemblance in style between this new national architecture, as we hope it may turn out to be, and the furniture and work generally of the modern school of craftsmanship, and such a resemblance is certainly the best possible omen for the future of art in England.

To this new style Marshcourt emphatically belongs. Already the pleasant Hampshire scenery is taking the new building to itself. Old yew trees against the white give a contrast familiar to one in this part of the country, the masonry begins to mellow in the moist wind, and the new house is becoming part and parcel of the old landscape.



EAST COURT.