

NOTICE OF AN EXAMPLE OF DOMESTIC ARCHITECTURE AT
COLERNE, WILTSHIRE.

THE Domestic Architecture of the Middle Ages is a branch of archæology which does not demand any excuse to commend itself to the notice of a Society like the Institute. Every one interested in the history of the past admits that this division of our study is well deserving attention, and that earnest exertion is required on our part, lest the few examples which remain should suffer more from the utilitarianism of modern days, than from the wear and tear of centuries, or be sacrificed in so-called improvements by persons alike unconscious of their value and careless of their preservation.

It can scarcely be requisite to observe that it is not only in the residences of the higher order of the people,—the convent, the castle, or the manor-house,—that we must look for specimens of our national architecture. Each of these had its own peculiar characteristics. The first, devoted to religion, was essentially ecclesiastical; the fortress was marked by a manner of architecture distinctly indicative of, and eminently adapted to, the military requirements of the time; whilst the manorial residences were generally of a description which, though approximating to the general features of mediæval dwellings, retained many of those means of security by which the houses of the more opulent were so long surrounded. It seems, therefore, desirable that greater attention should be directed to those long neglected examples of mediæval art,—the dwellings of the comparatively inferior classes, which doubtless exist in greater abundance than may be generally supposed, and lift their pointed gables in picturesque irregularity in many a quiet village, and by many a lonely road.¹

¹ Although the volumes on Domestic Architecture, published by Mr. Parker, contain notices of some examples of this

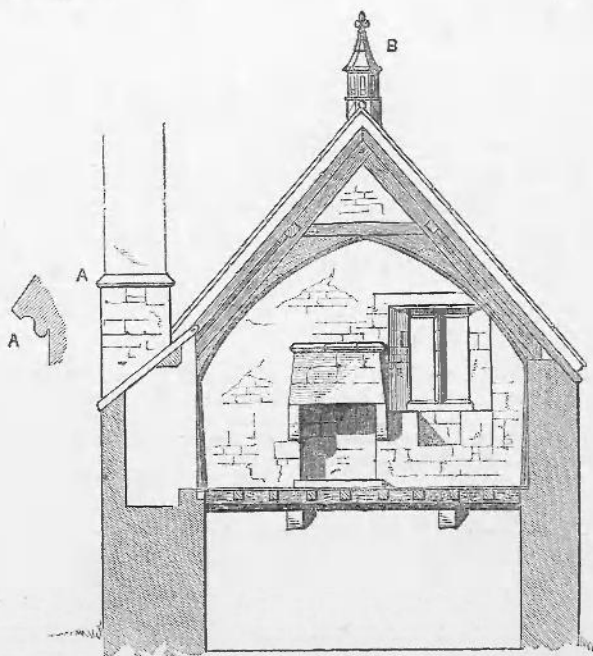
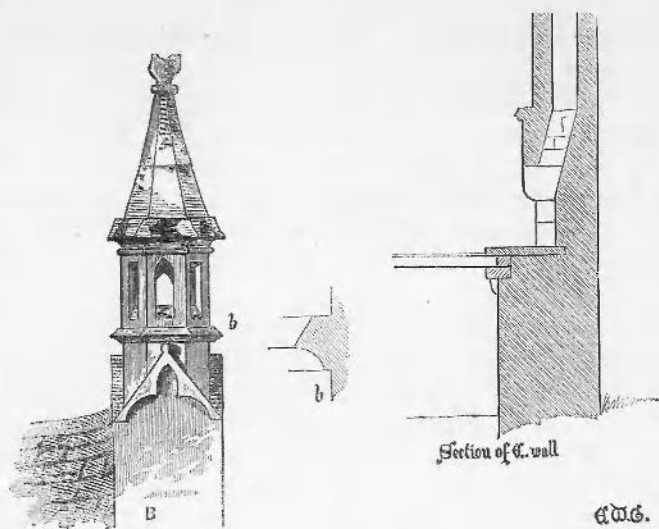
class, such as the Fish House at Mere, and one or two priests' houses, still the majority of specimens illustrated in that

At the west end of the village of Colerne, in Wiltshire, once a market-town, stands a small house, running east and west, with an arm jutting northward. With the exception of the little octagonal chimney on the point of the east gable, there is nothing about the house to attract attention ; there is the usual complement of sash-windows, and a barn has been annexed to the west end, which, being of the same height and width, gives the house an appearance of immoderate length. It is only when we proceed to examine the internal arrangements, and have obtained entrance to the back court and east bedroom, that we become aware of the interesting character of the little structure. The plan of the house is not unlike that of the Master's house at St. John's Hospital, Northampton (vol. i. Parker's Dom. Arch.) ; the principal chamber was on the first floor, the original height of the ground story being only a few inches more than 6 feet ; this is clearly visible in the eastern part of the building, where the floor and roof remain in their original position, the upper room being approached by a flight of narrow and steep stairs in the thickness of the north wall ; the steps themselves are of solid black oak, now cased with deal, and the wall has some projection which continues so as to serve as an external chimney-breast to the fireplace of the lower room. The principal chamber occupied nearly two-thirds of the entire length of the house, its dimensions being 27 feet by 14 feet. In the east wall (see section) is the fireplace, with a raised hearthstone and a projecting head supported on corbels, and finished by a moulded capping. By the side of the fireplace was a small two-light window with seats in the jambs, but, a few years since, the present occupier inserted a sash, and cut away the seats. The roof is simple but effective,—arched principals with collar beams, the chamfer of the arches continuing down wall posts to the floor ; the purlins are framed into principals, and the lower divisions of the roof have arched purlin braces. The turret chimney is octagonal externally, but the inside is circular ;

valuable work have been taken from dwellings of the aristocracy. It is therefore this deficiency that I would wish to see supplied ; for, notwithstanding that the general custom amongst the humble classes was to construct their houses of wood and comparatively perishable

materials, I nevertheless believe that by more diligent investigation much might be brought to light, now hidden and unnoticed, and much discovered that would tend to elucidate more completely the domestic architecture of bygone times, in this country.

ILLUSTRATIONS OF DOMESTIC ARCHITECTURE.



Section.

Details of a House at Colerne, Wiltshire. Date fifteenth century.

the openings are square and arched-headed ; it has had a battlemented stringcourse at the base of the diminutive spire which finishes with a finial. The external diameter is not more than 15 or 16 inches, and the base rests on the tabling without interfering with the gablets of the apex-stone.² From the principal chamber a doorway communicated with the solar or upper story of the arm jutting northwards. In this room a plain collar-beam roof, with arched purlin braces, and the remains of an open garderobe, are the only ancient features. The lower story is completely modernised.

Although there is no evidence about the present building that would induce me to assign to it an earlier date than the beginning of the fifteenth century, yet there are points which would lead us to suppose an earlier foundation ; for, taking it as granted that the house is of one date, of what use was the flight of stone steps which ascend from the back court to the room at the west end ? These steps, it should be observed, were removed a few years since from their original position against the wall. The roof, moreover, over this portion is of a rude and heavy description, the principal rafters being slightly hollowed towards their feet, forming a kind of constructional brace. Is it, therefore, to be inferred that this end of the building may be of earlier date, or that the oak stairs and chimney-breast in the north wall are additions ? From an examination of the building I should be inclined to accept the former as the most probable supposition.³

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² I may remark that the chimney is most effective in a practical point of view, and that occupants of the room to which it is attached are never annoyed by smoke.

³ I may add that the house has igno-

rantly been supposed to be of the twelfth century, from an old fireplace which was removed from the sitting-room on the ground floor, and which, according to the village authorities, had a stone in it dated 1100.