A SQUIRE'S HOME IN KING JAMES'S TIME.[1]

By J. A. GOTCH.

When Sir John Falstaff went recruiting into Gloucestershire, he paid a visit to an old comrade of his, a country squire, one Justice Shallow; and when after the day's work was done, the worthy knight and his host sat at their ease in an arbour over a dish of carraways and some sack, Sir John, struck with the appearance of the Justice's house, exclaimed "Fore God, you have here a goodly dwelling and a rich."

Let us now endeavour, so far as "devouring time" will permit, to see what kind of a house Justice Shallow really must have lived in, and how far it deserved Falstaff's commendations.

The outer door is approached by an avenue of newly planted trees, and itself opens into a court enclosed by a far-stretching stone balustrade. Above the door is the coat-of-arms of Shallow,—the twelve luces,—the fresh-water fish of which the Justice was so proud, although, good man, he cheerfully admitted, that the salt-water fish was an old coat too. Some Shallows of the richer sort had large lodges to their outer courts, such as may be seen at Charlecote, near Stratford-on-Avon, where the Sir Thomas Lucy lived who caught Shakspeare stealing his deer. Others, again, would have no court at all, and consequently would need neither door, nor entrance-lodge in the wall thereof: but, in a house with any pretensions to be considered a mansion, there would most probably be a courtyard.

On the other side of the court lies the house, fair, square, and symmetrical, with a projecting gabled wing on

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either side, a porch in the middle, and here and there a canted bay-window serving to relieve the general squareness of the building. The windows have narrow lights and thick stone mullions and transomes, for people were then hardly alive to those beauties of prospect which afterwards led them to adopt the wide and lofty sashes of the days of Queen Anne.

Each floor is marked by a string course or cornice of more or less incorrect classic profile, while the summit is crowned by an open balustrade running from one dainty gablet to another, and connecting together the great chimney-stacks which rear themselves aloft in the semblance of classic columns. At intervals along the balustrade and at every corner where it starts on a new career, rise square pedestals, supporting perhaps an heraldic animal, perhaps an urn, perhaps merely a ball, but always serving to give rhythm to the composition. In the blank spaces of walls below you may frequently see niches containing an unflattering image of some ancient worthy,—a monarch, a soldier, a philosopher, or a poet,—or else the counterfeit presentment of one of the heathen gods, which if it be a faithful likeness, wraps one in unspeakable wonder at the awe those deities inspired. Perhaps the frieze of the cornice contains a long legend couched in the Latin tongne, but more frequently is to be found something short and pithy over the door or on some of the panels that embellish the porch, as at Montacute, over one door is written—

> "Through this wide opening gate
> None come too early none return too late."

and over another—

> "And yours my friends."

The porch leads into a vestibule or passage, one side of which is formed by a handsome carved screen, sometimes of stone, but generally of oak, separating it from the hall: the other side is a solid wall, in which appears the buttery hatch. This arrangement is universal; the passage, never more than 12 feet wide and generally only 4 feet or 5 feet wide, with the hall on the side of it, and the buttery on the other. There was as yet no entrance-hall as we understand it, that is, a cold waste space devoted to hats

and coats, hard chairs, a barometer, and a few bad pictures, though that feature was shortly to appear: but there was always this passage connecting the entrance with the servants' offices, and being in reality part of the great hall cut off by a screen.

The buttery is described in Bailey's dictionary as "a place where victuals are set up" and its importance is manifested by the prominent place accorded to it on all plans of the period. Dinner was served here, and food (particularly of a liquid nature) was dispensed to all who had any claim to it, and to many who had not. One of the virtues of the "old worshipful gentleman" of the seventeenth century song was that he had "an old buttery hatch worn quite off the hooks." This ancient arrangement, and the use of passage, buttery, and hall may still be seen in many of the colleges at Oxford and Cambridge.

The hall itself was one of the chief features of a seventeenth-century house. In its position and size it was a survival from those days when the common hall served as feeding and sleeping place for the whole household; but by the time of which we are now treating the servants had been removed to their own separate department, and the family alone used the hall, except on occasions of festivity. The aspect of such a hall is tolerably familiar to all of us,—a large, lofty apartment, panelled half way up to where the great roof springs from wall to wall, leaving its highest spaces filled with the gloom of low light and much smoke. Its walls are hung, as the old song just quoted says,—

"with pikes, guns, and bows,
With old swords and bucklers, that had borne many shrewd blows."

At one end is the screen through which we passed from the passage, panelled throughout and rich with fantastic carving. Over it is the minstrels' gallery, already beginning to sink into silence, but carrying on as yet the ancient traditions of the "joyous science." At the other end is the dais, where at meal times the master sits in state. The dais is another survival from old times, but it still occurs in many of the new houses of the period. It is simply a step four or five inches in height, stretching

across the room. Almost invariably one end of the dais terminates in a large bay window commanding a view of the entrance court. The rest of this side of the hall is taken up with large windows running up to the start of the roof, and filled with coloured glass where the sunlight sparkles amid the scales of the twelve luces of the Shallows, or gilds the lines of some pale face looking out from a pearl-decked head dress. Over against these brilliant pictures, whose hues are led by the wintry sun across its fantastic front, is the fireplace, a cavern wherein a tree trunk may be burned. Its chimney-piece like the screen, is panelled all over, sometimes in wood, sometimes in stone. It abounds in wreaths, and knots, and ribands; in grotesque heads growing out of curious pilasters, and crowned with Ionic volutes; in panels of jewels, and straps, and scrolls. Perhaps all this wealth of carving is only a magnificent frame to the family arms; perhaps it serves to surround statues of some Classic abstraction, "Justitia" or "Prudentia," "Arithmetica" or "Geometria", something sententious it is sure to be, if only a Latin motto. The screen too, among its many ornaments, will have the family device, and so will the panelled ceiling. The house was built for the family, and proclaims its purpose at every turn. The arms, the crest, or the motto occurs in every possible place; in gables, in finials, on the parapet; on the water-spouts, on the weathercock, on the sundial. They are carved on the screen, they are painted on the windows, they are moulded in the plaster friezes, they are cunningly wrought in the escutcheons of the locks. The family animal grins at you from the gate post, he sits open-mouthed on the newels of the staircase, you lay hold of him when you poke the fire. He was a god-send to the craftsmen of those days, and right well did they make use of their opportunities.

From the hall several doors lead in different directions. Through the screen where we entered is the way to the servants' department. From the dais end the private apartments are approached, and access to the upper rooms is obtained. It will at once be seen, therefore, that the family occupied one side of the house and the servants the other, their common meeting ground being the hall. Sometimes indeed the servants were relegated

to the basement, and all their offices were underground, an arrangement constituting (so far as I know) an entirely new departure in house-planning at that time. But as a rule, they were located on the ground floor, and their department was usually on a large scale. Country houses in the seventeenth century had to depend entirely on their own resourses. They had to provide their own butchers and bakers, grocers and brewers. The larger houses had such offices as these:—laundry, dairy, cheese room, brew-house, malt-house, hop-house, slaughter-house, fish-house, and bakehouse, which shews that they could not rely on the visits of either the washer-woman, wine merchant, brewer, butcher, fishmonger, or baker. Of course the principal apartment on the servants' side was the Kitchen, almost always a large room with an enormous fireplace (in the chimney of which the smoke-jack turned by means of the draught caused by the fire), and often an oven. Next to the kitchen was the "pastry" a smaller room containing two ovens, a large one and a small. Reference is made to this obsolete apartment in one of the plays of the times, where it is a recommendation of the heroine as a wife that "she can do pretty well in the pastry." Then there were the pantry, the dry larder, the wet larder, and the boulting house, or place for boulting meal, that is, separating the meal from the bran. Very frequently there was a "surveying place" which was, probably, a serving-room; and in some houses may be found a "servants' day-room" a "hall for hynds" a place for pewter, a scullery, and a spicery. These, however, were only to be met with in the larger houses; but in every house were the kitchen, the pastry, the larders, and the buttery, with its stairs down to the cellar. These were essentials even in small houses. Reference has already been made to the importance of the buttery; the presiding genius of that place had a position corresponding to his environment. The butler was the principal servant, and acted as *major domo*. He had command of the cellars, the food, and the household stores. He is the favoured servant in the stage plays, and is left in charge when the master goes away. He looks after the young gentlemen, and in one place one of the fraternity tells us how these youths would sometimes cut their supper in the

kitchen and take it to the buttery to eat and to wash down with a good draught of ale.

Let us now again cross the hall and go to the family apartments. Here we find a parlour, or a "summer parlour" and a "winter parlour," though not unfrequently the winter parlour is on the same side as the kitchen, perhaps with a view of ensuring hotter dinners. There is sometimes a special "dining chamber" which shows that the hall was gradually losing its old character of the eating place, and becoming an entrance merely. If the houses were large, it would perhaps have a "withdrawing chamber" and a "smoking room" for the consumption of the new and fashionable weed, tobacco. Many country houses had a "chapel" in them; some had also a "chaplain's room" and "his study," but these luxuries were reserved for the more wealthy.

Of staircases there was no lack. There were always two, one for the family and one for the servants, and in larger houses they seem to have been put wherever there was a little space. They were one of the features in which the old workmen delighted, and which gave them some scope for design. They were broad and easy of ascent. From landing to landing they went, seven or eight steps at a time; at every turn there was a great newel post, a solid mass of wood, panelled, and moulded, and sometimes carved; from newel to newel stretched a massive handrail, wide and deep; and from it to the broad string board the space was filled with thickset balusters, fat, round, and substantial. No thin, winding, mahogany handrail with attenuated straight balusters and a mean wreathed end at the bottom, but everything solid, broad, and monumental. Indeed, the grandeur was sometimes carried beyond the strict limits of common sense, for, after gaining the principal floor, you may sometimes see the same grand stairs sweeping away up to the empty attics.

The first room that claims our attention upstairs is the gallery. This is a feature peculiar to the times. Every house having any pretensions to be considered a family residence had its gallery, which was always as long as the house would by any means allow. Not infrequently the house was planned with the express purpose of obtaining

a very long gallery, and there were many houses where it was as much as 180 ft. or 200 ft. long, and perhaps only 15 ft. wide. It almost invariably occupied the whole of one flank of the house, thereby obtaining light down one long side and at the two ends. The next important room was the "Great Chamber," which seems to have been a particularly large bedroom. The rest of the floor was taken up with bed-chambers, or "lodgings" as they were designated.

All these rooms, as well as the parlours, were either panelled with wood, or else hung with tapestry, setting forth with singular impartiality legends from the Bible, heathen mythology, and ancient history. The following, for instance, are taken from a contemporary list:—Storie of Susanna, the prodigal child, Saul, Tobie, Hercules, Lady Fame, hawking and hunting, Jezabell, Judith and Holofernes, David, Abraham, Hippolitus, Alexander the Great, Jacob, and so forth: a curious medley of subjects sacred and profane. When Borachio was holding that discourse with Conrade on the Fashion, which led to their arrest by the doughty Dogberry, he talked of the "Hercules in the smirched, worm-eaten tapestry." It was behind such arras that Polonius rashly concealed himself to overhear Hamlet's interview with his mother, and paid for his indiscretion with his life. And it was behind similar hangings, but of a humbler kind, that our friend Falstaff fell asleep when he took his ease in his inn, and thereby gave Prince Hal an opportunity of picking his pocket of the tavern bill, which showed how he had swallowed but a ha'porth of bread to such an intolerable deal of sack.

These hangings were carried from place to place when the family removed from one of their houses to another. In Beaumont and Fletcher's "Wit without Money" a great lady determines suddenly to leave the town for her country house. The whole household is thrown into confusion: Ralph calls to Roger to help down with the hangings: Roger cannot go because ne is packing his trunks: Humphrey is looking after my lady's wardrobe, and must, perforce, leave to someone else the task of getting down the boxes in the gallery and the coach cushions. The fact is, the men, one and all, detest the

idea of leaving the pleasant town for the dull country. The carts come, but there is no one to load them: the stuff lies in the hall, the plate is all packed, and above the bustle is heard the voice of my lady's sister, wanting her hat, her fan, and her cloak laid out in readiness: she begs Walter to tuck her little box up behind the coach: to see that the coachman carries her dog carefully, and that Oliver packs her looking glass discreetly, and is careful that her curls travel well. But then suddenly the order for departure is countermanded, my lady has changed her mind, and all the bustle subsides into contented quiet.

From this busy scene of a seventeenth-century household let us turn to another and more peaceful picture, drawn by the hand of Shakspeare. The scene is a bedchamber: in a great oak bedstead with panelled head and a tester supported by huge and bulbous posts, lies the sweet Imogen, reading by the light of a taper in a book of classic mythology. On the rush-strewn floor, at a little distance, is a great trunk, where the villainous Iachimo lies concealed. He himself afterwards described the chamber to Imogen's poor credulous husband, when boasting of a conquest he never made:—

> "Her bedchamber was hang'd
> With tapestry of silk and silver: the story,
> Proud Cleopatra, when she met her Roman.
> . . . . . The chimney
> Is south the chamber: and the chimney-piece
> Chaste Dian bathing: never saw I figures
> So likely to report themselves . . .
> The roof o' the chamber
> With golden cherubims is fretted. Her andirons
> (I had forgot them) were two winking cupids
> Of silver, each on one foot standing."

The picture is truly drawn: the great chamber with its fretted ceiling, its tapestried walls, its carved chimney-piece, and the winking Cupids of andirons: the beautiful lady reading in bed, and presently the stealthy Iachimo creeping from his trunk and making his infernal notes.

Reading in bed was a practice not infrequently indugled in even in those days. In an old hall in Worcestershire, is still to be seen a sixteenth-century bedstead, with a head formed of panelling with wide ledes. On the

panels are painted allegorical pictures, now difficult to decipher and more difficult to understand. In this bed some seventeenth-century person had lain awake to read, and for the better deciphering of his text had lodged his candle on one of the broad ledges. Perhaps the book was dull, perhaps a long day in the open air had wearied him, but he seems to have fallen asleep once upon a time, and to have suffered his candle to fall down and set fire to the wood, for there the charred ledges are, and there a poor scorched allegory.

We have now looked through the inside of the house: we have seen the great hall, we have been through the kitchen, and have looked into the stone ovens of the pastry: we have chatted with the butler amid the good things of the buttery: we have passed through the panelled parlours hung with family portraits: we have ascended the broad stairs and traversed the long gallery: we have examined the tapestry of the bedrooms and the great oak bedsteads. Let us now go out of doors and look at the gardens.

In front of the house is the court through which we first entered. It is partly enclosed by the projecting wings of the house, and partly by the stone balustrade, coped at a convenient height to lean upon. Flagged paths cross from one door to another, and the quarters between are of close-cropped grass, in strict accordance with Lord Bacon's instructions. "Let not the court be paved," says he, "for that striketh up a great heat in summer and much cold in winter." It was in such a court that Falstaff — in whose company we recently entered the precincts — inspected the ragged recruits procured for him by Justice Shallow, and finally selected the four worst, because they were not able to buy themselves off. On the kitchen side of the house is the wood yard, with its outbuildings screening it from observation. This is an important place, for it contains the fuel for the whole household, and from it, as the song says,

"Tom bears logs into the hall."

wood being the principal fuel in those days, and "a sea-coal fire," a circumstance to remember things by. On a third side is the orchard, reaching quite up to the house

and offering delightful facilities for a stroll. On the fourth side is the garden itself, filled with old fashioned sweet-smelling flowers, some of which wave beneath the casements of the parlour-bay, and shake their delicate odours into the panelled room. We may read what these flowers were in the poetry of the time: we know them all to-day, and, fortunately, are getting to know them better year by year as the fashion of "bedding out" declines. They were rosemary and rue, carnations and streaked gilliflowers, such as Perdita enumerates in the "Winter's Tale":—

> "Hot lavender, mints, savory, marjoram:
> The marigold, that goes to bed with the sun,
> And with him rises, weeping . . . . Daffodils
> That come before the swallow dares, and take
> The winds of March with beauty: violets, dim,
> But sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes,
> Or Cytherea's breath; pale primroses
> That die unmarried, ere they can behold
> Bright Phœbus in his strength, a malady
> Most incident to maids; bold oxlips, and
> The crown-imperial; lilies of all kinds,
> The flower-de-luce being one."

Some of these grew at their own sweet will; some were carefully disposed in geometrical patterns in square beds with narrow walks between, forming a large and fragrant sea of dancing colour. Such formal arrangements may be seen on a few contemporary house-plans, the architect occasionally varrying the prose of stone and lime with the poetry of the garden. Then, round the large open space thus brilliantly set, went terraces and deep shaded alleys, artfully contrived on a framing of carpenter's work. It was the remembrance of his garden that stirred the heart of Beaumont and Fletcher's "Noble Gentleman" when, weary of town, he cried out for the country, "where quietly" as he says—

> "Free from the clamour of the troubled court,
> We may enjoy our own green-shadow'd walks,
> And keep a moderate diet without art."

Such was the home of a squire early in the seventeenth century. Let us now look at such a house, not as occupied by those who built it, but by the builder's decendants in the nineteenth century.

It can hardly be denied that there is an absence of

comfort in most houses of that period. The accommodation is in excess of what is required now, and it is badly arranged. There is no scientific planning at all. Convenience, economy, sanitation are hardly studied in the least. Many of the rooms are thoroughfare rooms, or, if not, they are connected by long corriders, not infrequently dark. The hall, the dining room, the withdrawing-room, and the bedrooms are often terribly scattered, rendering it necessary to take quite a long walk before one can get to the breakfast table. Nothing is more common in these old houses than to see new corridors which have had to be added in order to go from one side of the house to the other without either making the tour of the rooms or going out of doors. Economy seems to have been almost unknown. The amount of outside wall to some comparatively small houses is astonishing. The waste of space in passages and staircases is something shocking. Sanitation was less heeded than it had been two centuries earlier.

The one department that did receive some care was the kitchen with its neighbouring offices. These are always arranged with a certain degree of attention, and their communication with the hall is generally well contrived. But with this ends, as a rule, the commendation which can be bestowed on the planning of seventeenth century homes, judged by the standard of the skilful planner of to-day.

But let us not complain; we may well leave that to those fortunate people who live in historic halls, and we will gladly help them in their endeavours to solve the problem of reducing a seventeenth century house to terms of the nineteenth century; while, as mere lovers of the picturesque, we cannot but feel that if the houses are straggling they give us long stretches of roof, quaint gables, innumerable chimney stacks, and delightful expanses of lichen-covered wall; and we can cordially echo the remark of Falstaff to his friend the Justice, "Fore God, you have here a goodly dwelling and a rich."