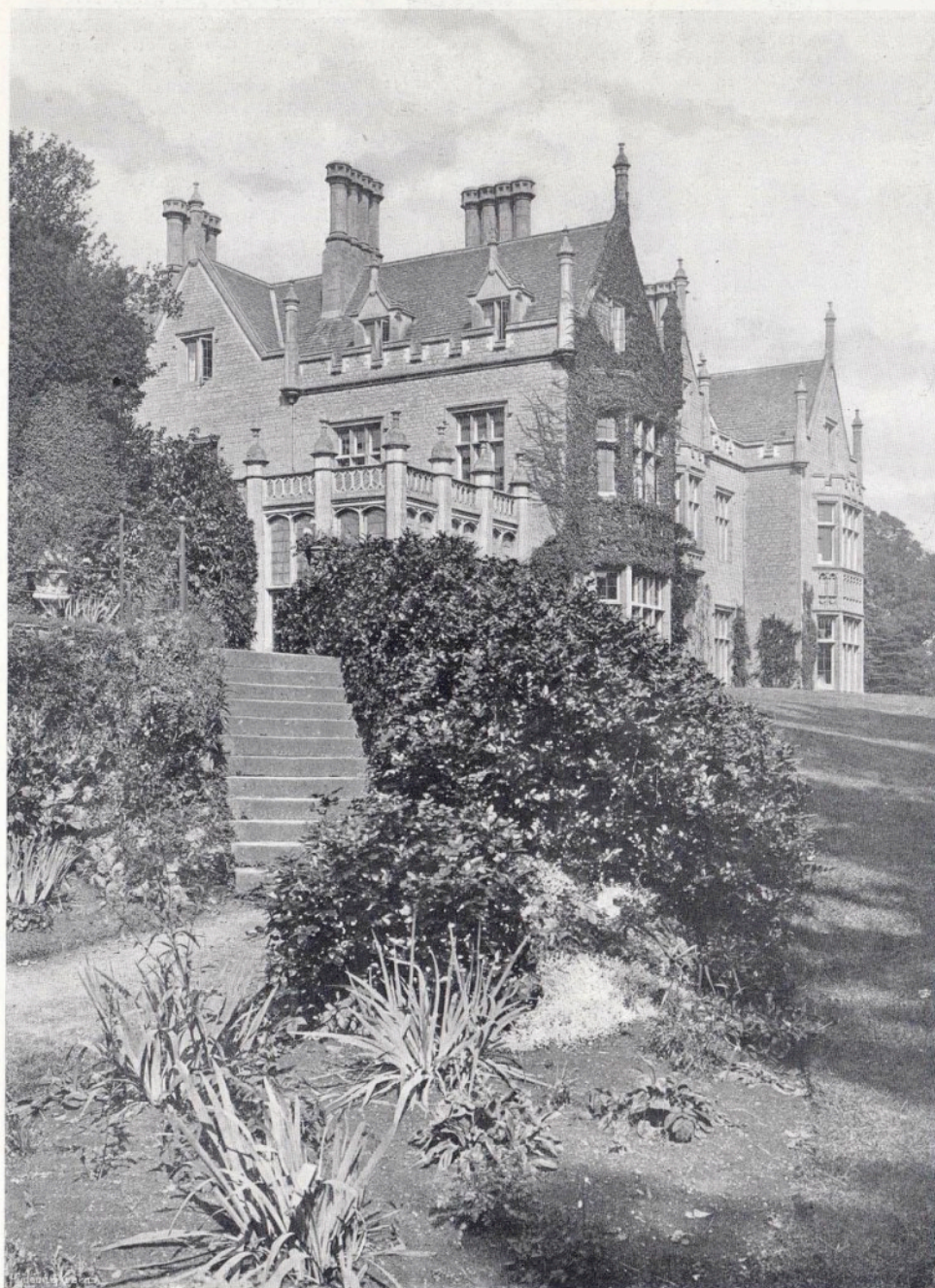


WHEN the story of architecture in the nineteenth century comes to be written, a word should be said on the first efforts to revive the work of early Tudor days. Beckett House is one of the first examples of this kind of effort. In some respects it is a very successful one. In any case it deserves a certain respect, because

the owner and architect tried to carry out an ideal, and spared no expense to do it worthily. The Manor of Beckett is a very ancient one. Like everything in the Vale of the White Horse, it goes back to Saxon times. It was a "tithing" of Shrivenham Parish. When it was made a manor after the Norman appropriation it was held from the Crown on the condition that the lord "offered"

to the King two white pullets when he passed that way. As he does not seem to have been bound to do more than make this handsome offer, and the chickens were presumably allowed to run away if the King did not want to accept them, or had no one good at holding live chickens to take them, the lord may be considered to have held his manor at a tolerably cheap rate. Situation, rather than the actual site, is the main natural attraction of the place. It stands on a flat, looking towards the Downs, and more particularly towards that section of them which lies between the White Horse Hill and Lyddington Castle, the corresponding prehistoric fortress inside the Wiltshire border. It does not nestle under the Downs like the lovely moated house of Compton Beauchamp hard by, but stands in the vale, surrounded by a flat park dotted with huge elms, and then by an inner ring of water. The monarch with a taste for epigram who remarked that a certain company were "too many for ambassadors, but too few for an army," would probably say that the waters round Beckett House are too wide for a moat and too narrow for a lake. But they are alike the most costly and the most considerable of the artificial beauties of the place. The springs under the Downs feed the lake and keep it fresh. It winds all along the south front, the west front, and in a long mere far to the north, opposite the site of the old house. The only remains of the old building are some parts of the brewing-house, which was evidently part of a non-Gothic building, and one of the best examples of an Inigo Jones garden-house in the south of England. Of course the real designer is not known, so the best artist has the credit of it. But its proportions are so good, and the position, at the end of a lofty terrace running





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GARDENS OLD AND NEW.—BECKETT HOUSE: THE CHINA HOUSE.

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LOOKING TOWARDS THE BROAD WALK.

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into the lake, is such, that it makes the total loss of the house it belonged to the more regrettable. The view here given cannot show the fine colour, the rich warm yellow of the stone, the grey of the old slates, or the solidity of the structure. It is built on a kind of crypt of rough stones forming a boat-house. The roof with its hooks for poles and lanterns for illuminations was intended to suggest the garden buildings of the Far East. Its name preserves this connection of ideas, for it is called the China House. The terrace to the China House is a wide grass walk, with a descent where it joins the building of some twenty feet to the lake. On either side are bushes of roses and briars, and below on the wall itself magnolias, purple and pale clematis, fuchsias, and figs. The walk does not end at the China House door,

though it might do so with propriety, for inside are light, large windows, filling the house with light, and space to entertain a party of twenty guests. But all round the China House is a wide balcony of stone, round which formerly were wrought-iron railings fixed in the stone with lead. Only the sockets now remain. But the walk, which is completely sheltered from the rain by eaves seven feet wide, makes a delightful lounge, looking over an acre of lake and lily leaves surrounded by bright, steep terraces of turf on the margin by the house, and by dim yew trees elsewhere, whose branches touch the surface of the lake. To the left and front of the pool, looking north, are the Haunted Walk, the Grove, and Broad Walk. The former crosses the lake, is fringed with ancient yews, and contains nothing more

in keeping with ghosts than a very ancient wash-house, which may have suggested the use of a white sheet to some practical joker. But the grove is particularly fine. A grove, as part of a garden lay-out, was almost necessary—so we gather from Mr. Inigo Thomas,—in the estimation of a certain period of builders and gardeners. That at Beckett is like one at Gosfield Hall in Essex. Yews, grass, and very tall, finely-grown oaks, beeches, and limes are its features, also straight paths (those at Gosfield are winding), which are made to look bright under the dark trees by tons of golden, crumbling gravel dug out of the hill of Coxwell, about four miles off. Coxwell gravel is one of the aids to Berkshire gardens, contrasting well in colour with the trees, lawns, and water which are their common and beautiful adornment.

The bridge across the lake is not remarkable for architectural detail, but is light, and suited for its purpose. It rests



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THE HOUSE—SOUTH-WEST.

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THE BRIDGE CORNER.

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on piers covered and shrouded entirely in bamboo and fuchsias, and the same flowers and fronds flank the approaches. The lawns cover acres of smooth green turf, set with graceful and uncommon trees, and fringed for hundreds of yards by the lake. Deciduous cypress, which always does best by the water, grows here to perfection; so do Mediterranean pines, with whose narrow dark green foliage the pale broad leaves of the catalpas and the feathery deciduous cypress make the necessary contrast. These lawns need breaking up with masses of colour, and the addition of vases and standard flowering shrubs. In themselves beautiful, they need brightening and positive decoration. Where this has been attempted the effect is good, as in the terrace looking towards the Broad Walk. In this view the size and beauty of the trees which line the front of the grove on either side are shown. The terrace steps would be the better for some brighter setting than the rhododendrons on the right. Where the mixed border runs under the old wall on the left the prospect is delightful. The lay-out of these gardens was probably much hampered by the timidity and hesitation characteristic of the time at which they were made, and in reference to which allowance must be made for shortcomings. About the close of the Great War, and for several years after, the country tried purely classical building. Imitations measured to an inch from Greek temples were built for London churches and provincial assembly halls. Even the country houses gained solid and perfectly correct Ionic or Doric porticos, like that at the then Montagu House. The idea of gardens was absolutely foreign to this kind of taste. It was as



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A CORNER OF THE LAKE.

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remote from garden architecture as a railway terminus. Then there was a set-back to what was called "Gothic." Much of it was awful—what we call "carpenter's Gothic" now. No one—not a single man—realised the principles of Gothic building; but we copied the details, and we got things like the big Non-conformist College at Hampstead and the Houses of Parliament, which are good in a way, but were built by an architect whose interest and understanding were mainly in Renaissance work. Others, more cautious and more conscientious, either took the trouble to master the laws of proportion in good Gothic or Tudor work, or copied it exactly, not only details, but the whole



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A VIEW OVER THE LAWN.

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structure. There is a little of both at Beckett, which can hardly be called a creation, yet it is not a slavish copy, and not a mere patchwork of Tudor detail plastered on anyhow. People who built in this way often made a sad hash of the interior. But readers who will look critically at the outside of Beckett and imagine that it is 300 years old will give the architect credit for being rather ahead of his time. The east front is quite good. If it had been built at the date from which it was copied it would have had a dozen rampant beasts, and twice as many gilded

if he did not realise it, and had the money, which there is little doubt that he had, for expense was not spared at Beckett—was probably this. All garden design and architecture was practically Renaissance, or touched with Italian. There was no Gothic garden architecture. Anything imitated from Gothic looks like bits of a church stuck about a garden. A Gothic fountain looks like a font, and a Gothic summer-house like a little shrine. So the architect had either to drop his Gothic, and go out on Renaissance for his garden, or else let it alone. And



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THE EAST FRONT.

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vanes. There are only two on the turrets, but even these help. The design makes a whole, which is more than can be said for a good deal of modern Gothic of the same period. But having reared a Gothic house, of the pre-Renaissance order, in which there is practically none of the suggestion from Italy which improved the multitudes of first-class Tudor houses of the time of Elizabeth and later, a house in which there is not a single detail which would not fit into the design of a college of the days of the founder of Corpus at Oxford, the designer was afraid to put any architecture into his garden whatever. And the reason—even

being a careful man he did let it alone, only he or his employer had the good taste and sense to keep the fine old summer-house over the lake—a purely Renaissance building—and to make the most of it by improving the terrace leading to it.

Beckett is now let on a long lease to Mr. Whitehead of torpedo renown. He occupies it mainly as a hunting centre in the winter, spending his summer in Austria, where at Fiume is not only lovely scenery, but also the original home of the Whitehead torpedo.

BOOKS OF THE DAY.

AMONG the books which the readers of COUNTRY LIFE have recently been recommended to order from their circulating libraries is Mr. F. D. How's "Archbishop Plunket" (Isbister), and it is by no means desired to withdraw the recommendation. The late Lord Plunket was a striking figure in his generation, and he played his part consistently and sincerely, if not with unvarying success, through a very critical period, and it is but right that men and women should read the official record of his life. But that phrase "official record," which has slipped from the pen almost instinctively, is in itself an undesigned indication of the fault which mars this book. Mr. F. D. How is not without experience as an episcopal biographer. He has put together the life of his own father, and that of Bishop Selwyn, but in this case it is undeniable that he has been more dull than was in any way necessary. He was writing under conditions of an uncommonly advantageous character. His subject was a man of stately grace and polished intellect, whose death happened four years ago. Even those who disagreed with Lord Plunket's views on grave questions would by no means have complained if his biographer had put something approaching to spirit into the enunciation of his defence of them; and the rest of us may reasonably suggest that there was room, which has not been used, for something approaching to pleasant writing in connection with interesting scenes in the life of Lord Plunket, concerning which there could be no controversy and no bitterness of feeling. We might, for example, have heard something more of his life at Cnettenham, of which he was one of the earliest sons, and of that notable gathering when the college celebrated its jubilee, which is referred to in a letter from Lord James of Hereford early in the volume. The occasion was one at which I had the privilege of being present; it was grand, it was also touching, and a little of the despised art of fine writing might have been employed upon it with good result. Similarly the account of the visit paid to Lord Plunket by Archbishop Benson is sadly jejune and bald. Still the character of the departed Archbishop and his personality do stand out more or less clearly after a perusal of this volume, and the one chapter which is devoted to a writing approaching to gossip shows a

pretty picture. There we see the stately Archbishop, one of the handsomest men of his generation, writing in his shirt-sleeves, designing his garden, tending his herbaceous borders, building elaborate fowlhouses, playing golf and croquet, and all the rest of it. It is an interesting picture, and, as the present Primate of Ireland no doubt thinks, a more pleasing one than that which was seen at Madrid in 1894. On the whole, however, it is to be feared that Mr. How's book represents a considerable literary opportunity not lost, but insufficiently used; and it may be suggested, now that it is too late, that the work might have been better done by an Irishman.

Let us turn to something lighter. I am not ashamed to confess myself an ardent admirer of all the books which bear on their title pages the name "Castle," whether they be those of "Agnes and Egerton Castle," or whether "Egerton Castle" writes alone. They have in them those qualities of romance, dramatic power, picturesque description, terseness, tragedy, and comedy which are rarely found in combination; and "Marshfield, the Observer" (Macmillan) is not only worthy to be compared with the earlier works of Mr. Egerton Castle alone, but a distinct advance upon them. The original conception running through the series of connected tales is perhaps a trifle whimsical, but not any the worse for that. Meldrum Marshfield is accomplished, exceedingly learned, a student, a theorist, a persistent watcher of human nature in its strangest manifestations, and he has a pretty knack of relating his experiences to his friends. Excellently well told is the story of "The Cold Mrs. Tollmage," the statuesque wife of the Archdeacon, whose cold heart is set on fire at once by the sight of Lord Cosmo Cameron.

"This descendant of a long line of exalted Highland brigands—although a pure Gael through almost all his ascendancy, and therefore not a representative of the strongest existing race—was and is an ideally beautiful son of Nature's vigour, and one whom the polish of modern luxurious life has had no power to deteriorate. A more perfect type of manhood, at least to my mind (for I dislike your hulking pink-and-white Saxon as much as I admire his destiny), never stepped this earthly crust. As to face, he belongs, according to my classification,