

BEAUTIFUL HOMES AND THEIR OWNERS.

AMONG the stately homes of England splendid Highclere is justly famed. The great pile of buildings forming an imposing whole is not yet a hundred years old, but, nevertheless, it has a look of ancient splendour, for, architecturally speaking, the Castle owed its being to the genius who designed the Houses of Parliament.

Highclere Castle is singularly fortunate in its situation and in its associations. In the days of Merry England the estate belonged to the Bishopric of Winchester, and it was the favourite country seat of William of Wykeham. The windows of Lord Carnarvon's country seat command views extending into four counties, and the grounds have many singular and, indeed, unique features, of which more anon, for each successive owner of the place has devoted as much attention to the outside as to the inside of his country home, and the present Peer has made Highclere one of the best sporting

estates in the kingdom. There, at this time of year, he entertains parties of shooting friends, and one of the first guests entertained by young Lady Carnarvon after her marriage was our present Sovereign, who spent some memorable days shooting over Lord Carnarvon's coverts in the autumn of 1895.

It would require a volume to give anything like a good account of the many art-treasures now garnered in Highclere Castle. In the beautiful drawing-room hangs a collection of what have been described as the finest Gainsboroughs and Reynolds' in the kingdom. The Gainsboroughs include the famous portraits of that Lord Chesterfield who succeeded the writer of the historic Letters and his wife; also the delightful "Cottage Children," which proved that the artist was able to be as successful when dealing with humble sitters as with the great folk he generally painted.

Lovers of art delight in seeing the curious Reynolds which shows a plucky lad—the present Earl's great-grandfather—playing with a group of lion-cubs.

Lady Carnarvon, who is half French by birth, has always had a special cult for the memory of the hapless Marie Antoinette, and there are many relics of the last Queen of France both in the great drawing-room and in the dainty boudoir, which reflects its owner's personal tastes and fancies. The principal apartment of Highclere is the great hall, a really splendid apartment, enriched with the Coats of Arms of the Herbert family and of their wives, these including that of the lady who was a younger sister of Catherine Parr. The hall is used as a living-room, and there many great entertainments have been given of late years, though the brilliant theatricals given in honour of the King's visit took place in the library, where are stored priceless manuscripts and many quaint eighteenth-century works now worth their weight in gold, one such being a complete collection of the famous "Cries of London." In this room is also preserved the chair in which the great Napoleon sat when he signed his abdication at Fontainebleau; this chair has another association with the modern Cæsar, for it was habitually used by the Emperor when holding a Council of his submissive Ministers.

Even at this time of year, Lord and Lady Carnarvon spend much of

their time out of doors. The park shows every variety of fine scenery, particularly notable being the trees, though a former Earl of Carnarvon is said to have defined the British oak and spreading beech as "Excrescences provided by Nature for the payment of debts."

The great feature of Highclere Park, however, is the lake known as Milford Water, and which, in addition to a delightful island, boasts on its edge a fine, substantial house, in old days known as "The Casino," which was actually inhabited for a while by the family during the restoration of the Castle. Now, Milford House, as it has been rechristened, is often the scene of a merry sporting-lunch, of which the honours are done by Lady Carnarvon, who, with her feminine friends, generally walks out from the Castle in order to preside at the informal meal.

Lord Carnarvon follows the usual fashion in not beginning shooting till November is well on its way; but when he and his friends do get to work in the celebrated Highclere Wood, they give an account of themselves which is rarely matched elsewhere. From the sporting point of

view, the most interesting feature of Highclere is the high flying of the birds: this is owing not a little to the scientific attainments of both the master of the estate and of his clever gamekeeper. When Lord Carnarvon inherited the property, some fourteen years ago, the average season's bag was about two thousand pheasants and some three hundred and fifty partridges; now on the first shooting-day of each autumn the owner of Highclere and four or five of his friends show a bag of about fifteen hundred head.

The present Lord Carnarvon is one of those modern Peers who "do many things in many lands, and do them very well." A lover of art and a true virtuoso, he has added many treasures to both his country homes, Highclere and Bretby Park, while before his marriage he was a great traveller and shot big game all over the world.

While still on the sunny side of thirty he married Miss Almina Wombwell, and the wedding, taking place from Lansdowne House, was one of the most notable social events of 1895. Lady Carnarvon has all the French charm of appearance and manner; she is a great lover of beauty and beautiful things, and takes a keen delight in her splendid country home, while yet being fond of London. She has two children—Lord Porchester, a son and heir who is now six years old, and a little daughter of four. When in town, Lady Carnarvon entertains in one of the most stately, old-world houses in Berkeley Square, a mansion which, though bearing the unlucky number of thirteen, has brought only good fortune to its possessors.

The head of the Herbert family can boast of some distinguished relatives. One of his two uncles is the Hon. Alan Herbert, who has now been for unnumbered years one of the most honoured of Anglo-French Parisian celebrities; his other uncle is that brilliant Don Quixote of politics and manners, Mr. Auberon Herbert. Lord Carnarvon's own elder sister, Lady Burghclere, is one of the most successful of Liberal hostesses, and the Carnarvon branch of the Herbert family are, of course, closely related to that of which Lord Pembroke is chief.



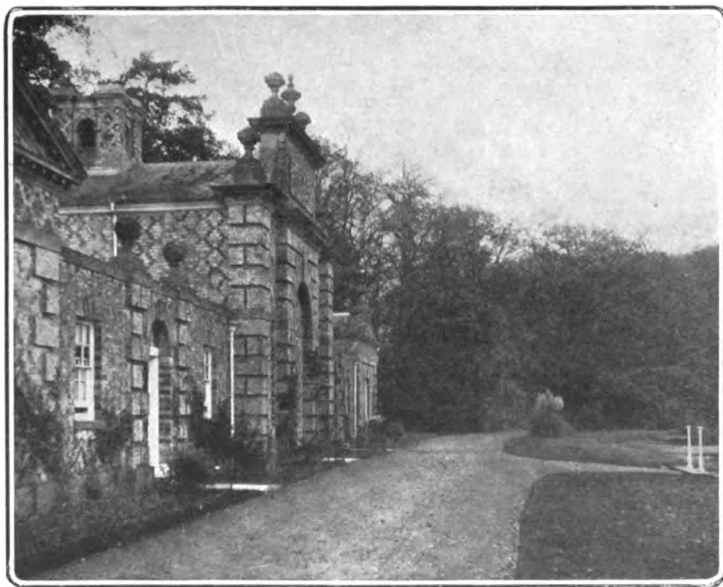
THE COUNTESS OF CARNARVON.

Photograph by Alice Hughes, Gower Street.



LORD CARNARVON.

A SNAPSHOT.

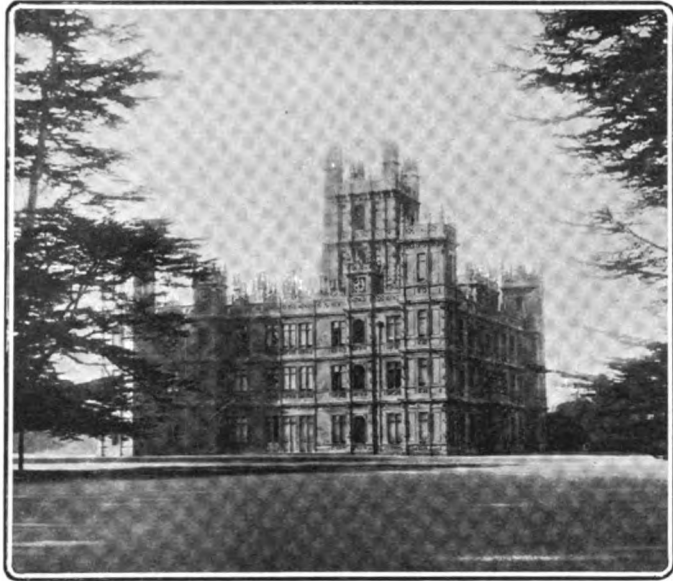
LORD PORCHESTER,
THE EARL OF CARNARVON'S
HEIR.

MILFORD HOUSE, USED AS A SHOOTING-LODGE.

Photograph by Leonard Willoughby.

BEAUTIFUL BRITISH HOMES.

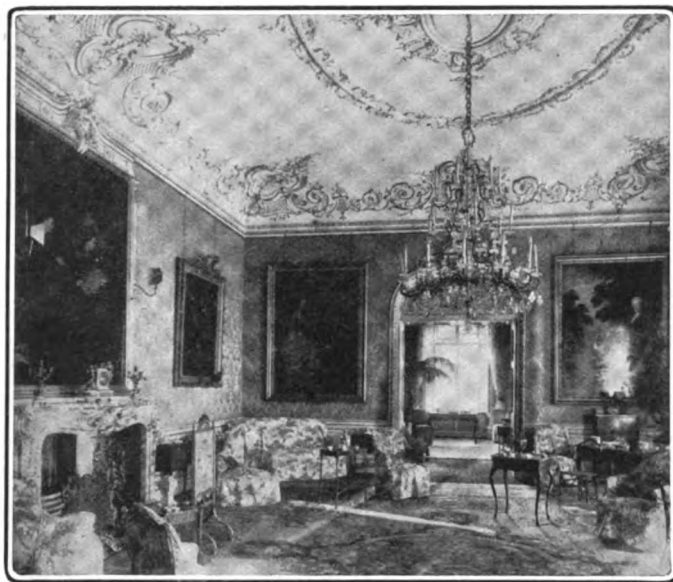
XLII.—HIGHCLERE CASTLE, THE HAMPSHIRE SEAT OF THE EARL OF CARNARVON.



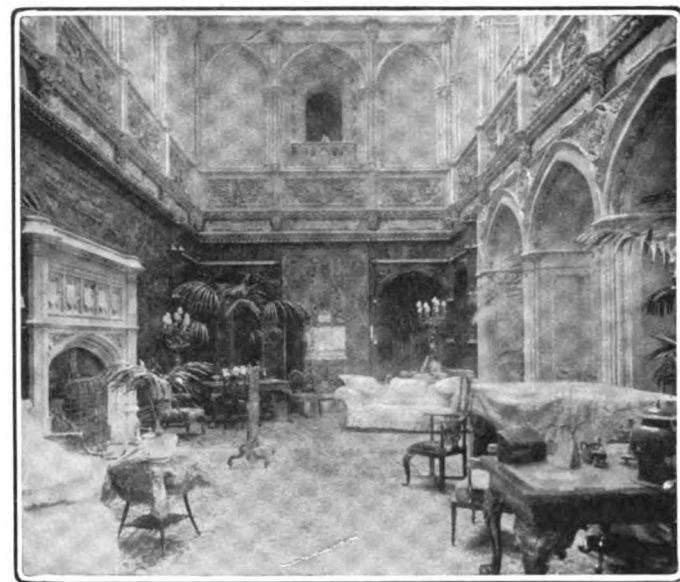
THE CASTLE, FROM THE NORTH-EAST.



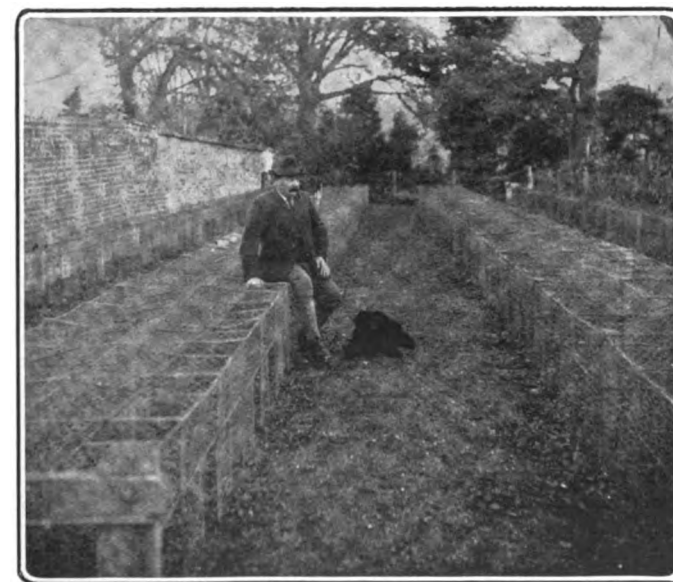
THE LIBRARY, WITH NAPOLEON'S CHAIR AND TABLE.



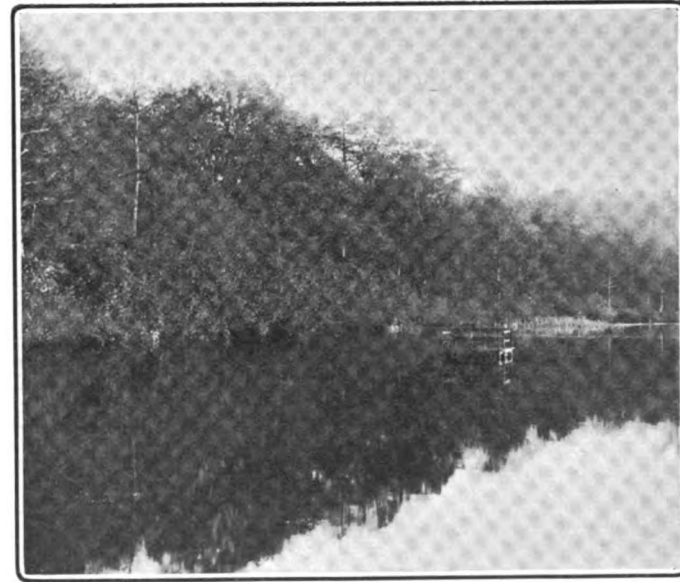
THE DRAWING-ROOM.



THE HALL.



SOME OF THE PHEASANT-PENS.



THE UPPER LAKE, SHOWING THE SHOOTING-PLATFORM.

Photographs by Leonard Willoughby.