

# A COUNTRY HOUSE. BY M. H. BAILLIE SCOTT.

IF one examines the average modern house, it will be found to consist of a series of rectangular boxes—"reception rooms" as they are generally called. There is the dining-room, drawing-room, and so forth, and when the house is small these rooms are correspondingly decreased till the minimum of size and maximum of discomfort are reached, and one contemplates at last the common spectacle of a large family crowded into a small room which is already filled to overflowing with unnecessary and incongruous furniture.

A logical expression of this habit would necessarily assume, one would think, a dominant note in the plan—a central hall—or living room, which one would like to make as large and airy as funds permit, with plenty of floor space. One would like to add a great ingle fireplace with seats wide and low, and, for the rest, furnish it not for effect, but with only those few things which are really necessary, each piece of furniture being the expression of a real and substantial need, and as serviceable and simple in

its way as the bag of tools of the workman who made it.

As for decoration and pattern—if we have no artist at our disposal we can afford to dispense with all that, and, instead, be content to see posts, beams and walls each doing their appointed task.

There is no necessity, artistic or practical, to obscure these real and fundamental things with a superficial veneer of plaster and paint, and to crown all with a wall paper with an impossible name and frieze to match. If construction and constructive features are good enough decoration for our cathedrals and churches, surely they are good enough for our homes, and bricks, timber, and plain white-washed spaces may well replace much of the foolish and fantastic features which constitute what we now dignify by the title of "decoration."

Having arrived at the central idea of a hall or living-room as the keynote of a home, it follows naturally that one must group round this the various other rooms which may be required by the family, and these may be regarded as mere appendages and dependencies of the hall, not pretending to compete with it as rooms, but rather becoming merely recesses, each specially modified



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for its particular function in the domestic economy. Some of these may indeed be left quite open to the hall without any more substantial division than a curtain, and so bear to it some such relation as the chapels in a cathedral to the main building. Others, from the nature of their uses, may demand a more effectual screen from sound and sight, but these will not be as large as if they formed a unit in a series of small rooms. And so we may welcome the cosiness of these little retreats in contrast to the open spaces of the hall on the other side of the door.

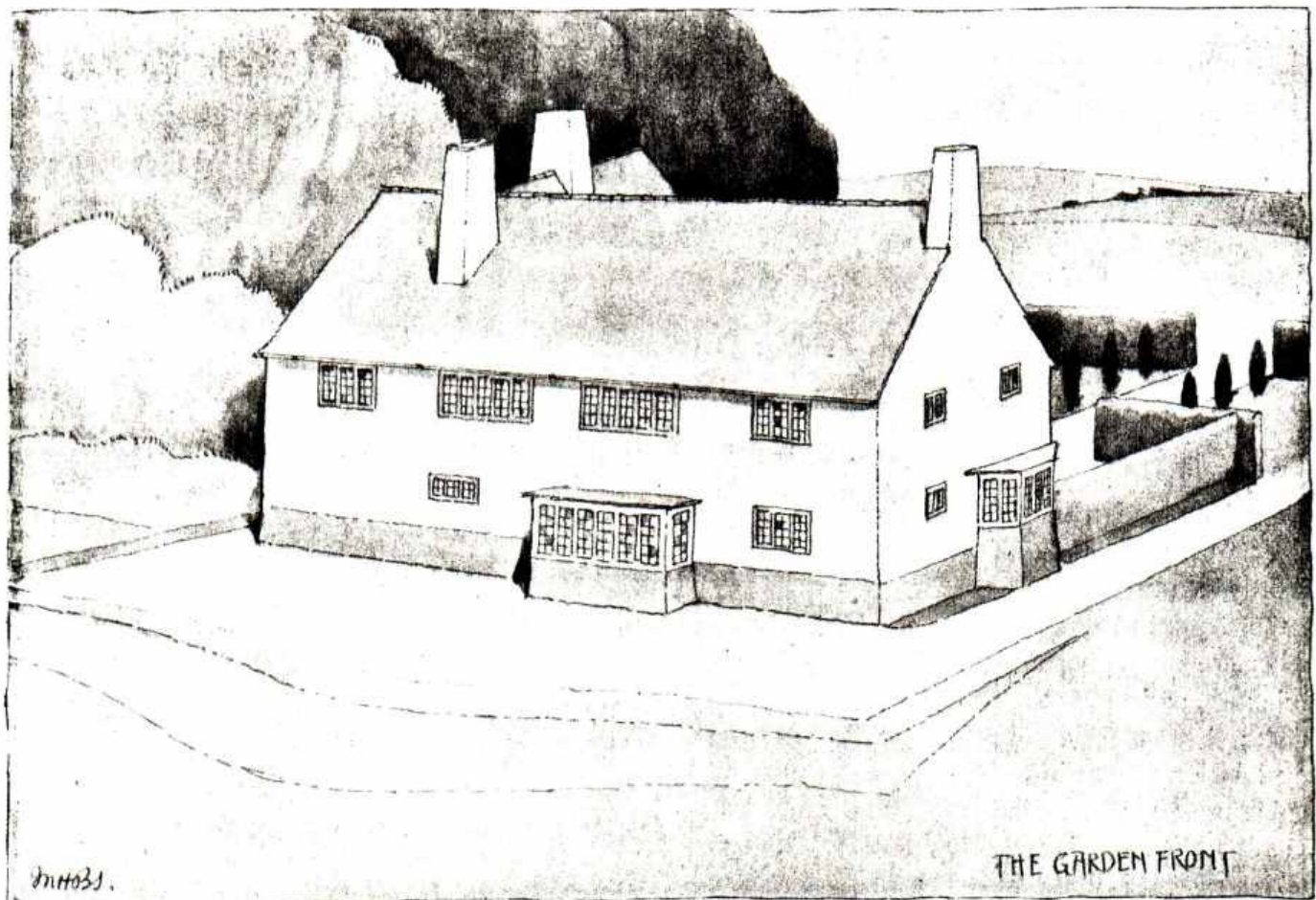
To consider these in detail—these appendages to the hall—there is, first, the “ladies’ bower,” the “drawing-room” as we now call it. This is a recess in the hall which is set apart for tea and music, and is characterised by a certain daintiness of treatment which bears a feminine relation to the masculine ruggedness of the hall. Viewed from the great bench of the hall ingle, it appears as some delicate and dainty Early English Lady Chapel seen through the massive pillars of a Norman nave. Still it does not entirely separate itself from the hall or claim a definite and distinct existence as a room; and so by this union

both hall and bower are gainers—the hall being enriched by that vista of glimmering whiteness, seen under its massive posts and beams, and the bower becoming all the more delicate and all the more cosy in such a close companionship with the solid qualities and open spaces of the hall.

At the opposite end of the hall is another recess, which is set apart for meals. The title “refectory” may sound a trifle affected, but it is given in default of any other which so fully expresses its uses. Here one catches a glimpse of a table bright with silver, glass, and flowers against the dark background of the seating which runs round three sides of the table.

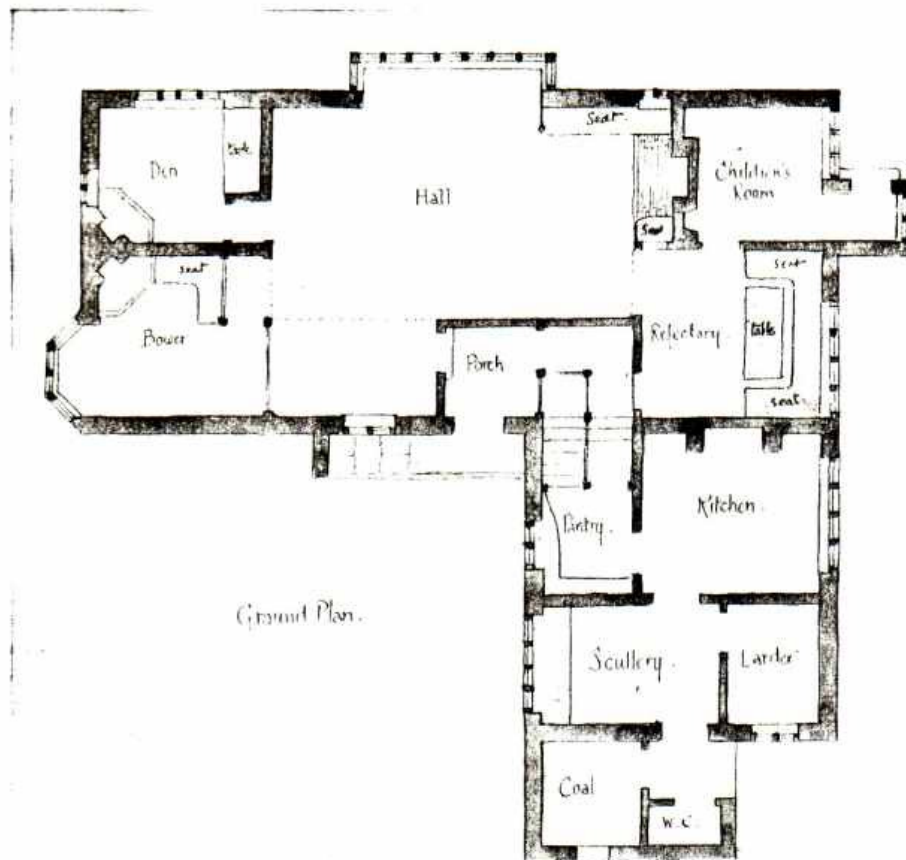
Some such arrangement of a dining-table has already been described in *THE STUDIO*, so that one need not here enlarge on its special advantages.

Curtained off from the hall, the table is prepared from the service door, near the kitchen, without disturbing the privacy of any other part of the home. Draw back to the opposite end of the hall, and, looking between the posts which support the gallery above, try to realise the effect of this low recess with its high-backed seats and simple table—an effect which is gained by what is fundamentally a





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practical solution of a practical problem, and then transport yourself in imagination to the cockney horrors of some dingy dining-room in Upper Tooting, full of all that expensive and cumbrous furniture with which the average householder surrounds himself. Such a contrast seems to suggest the futility of any attempt to wean the mind of the dweller in the suburbs from its innate love for everything which is meretricious and ugly.

"The Real," says Carlyle, "if you will stand by, it is respectable—the coarsest hobnailed pair of shoes if honestly made according to the laws of fact and leather are not ugly; they are honest, and fit for their object; the highest eye may look on them without displeasure, nay with a kind of satisfaction. This rude packing case, it is faithfully made; square to the rule, and formed with rough and

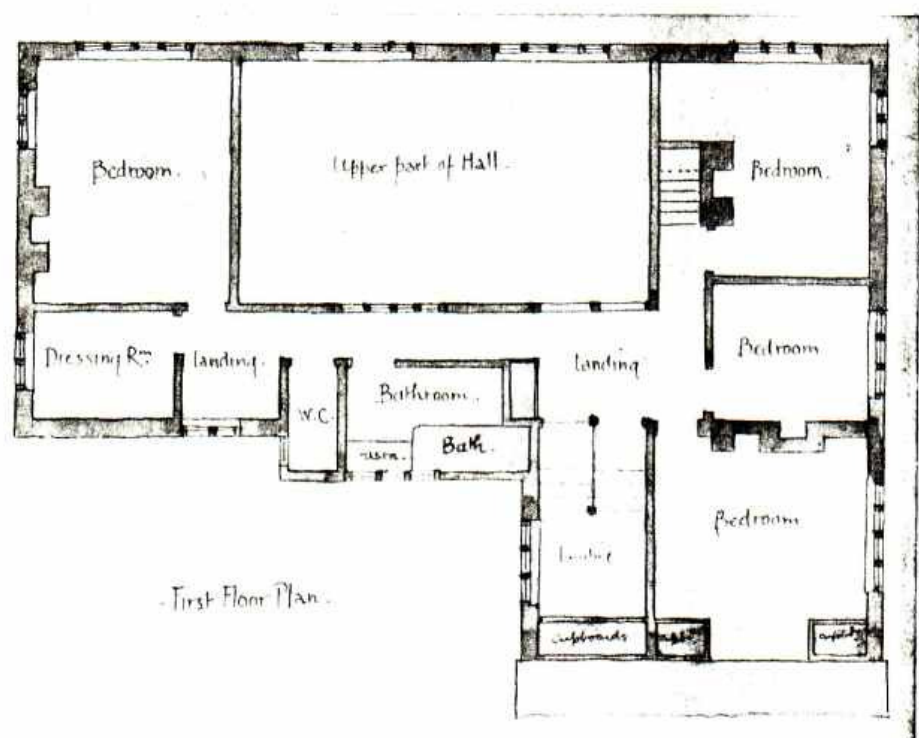
ready strength against injury, fit for its use; not a pretentious *hypocrisy* but a modest, serviceable *fact*. Whoever pleases to look upon it will find the image of a humble manfulness in it, and will pass on with some infinitesimal impulse to thank the gods."

"A modest, serviceable fact"—that is indeed what one would wish a house and its furnishing to be—and more than that? One should be cautious in trying for more than that.

"More than this," says Ruskin, after describing a simple English home, "more than this, few should seek."

The very spirit which impels a man to achieve a notable excellence in his habitation and surround-

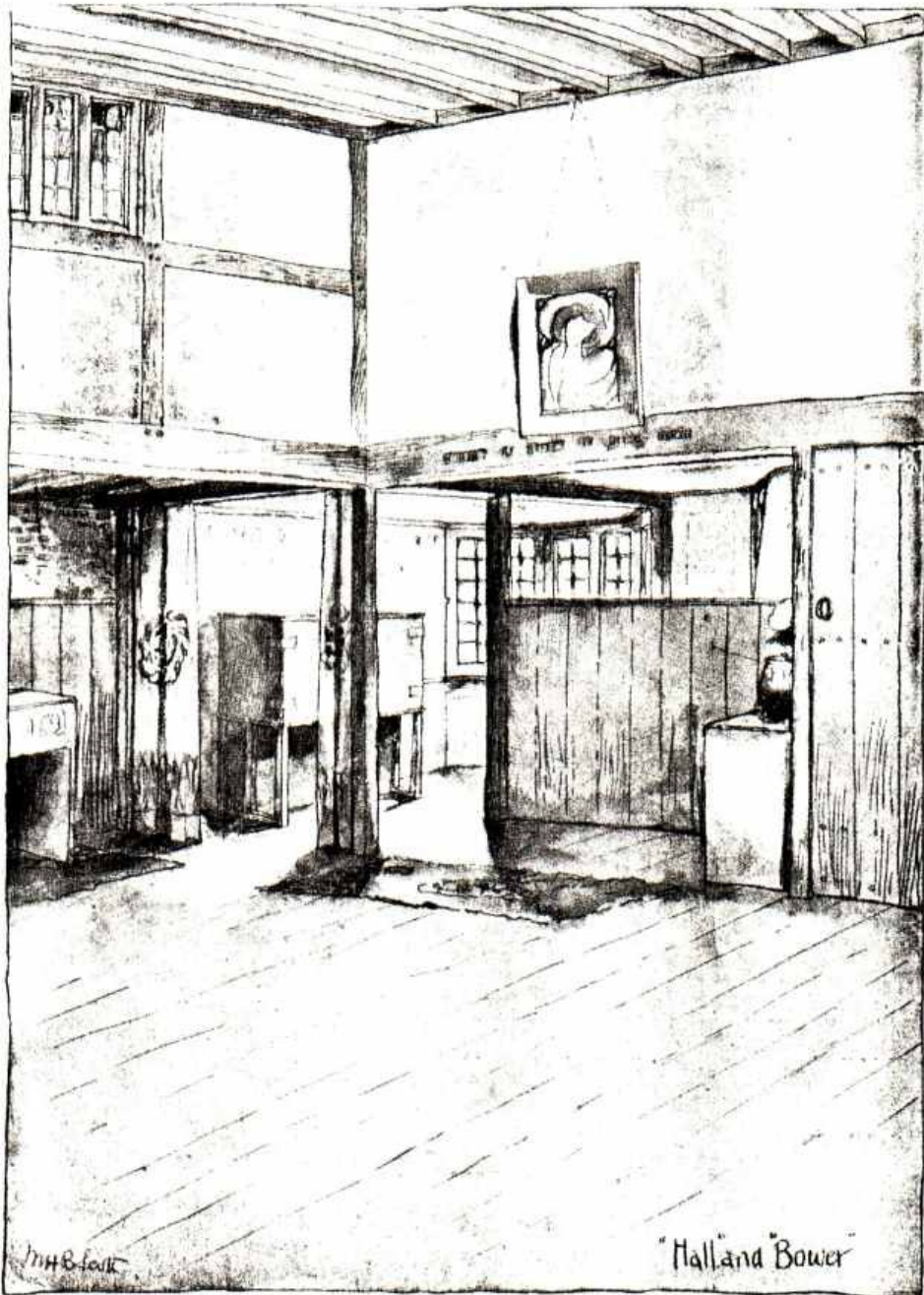
ings suggests that this can be most readily gained by costliness of material and workmanship, or, failing that, an imitation of such costliness. We dream a dream of marble halls, and we realise as a practical result of such a



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THE HALL AND BOWER

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least they should be the best of their kind. Let us forego all aspirations after palatial surroundings, leaving such things to the few who are justified in seeking and successful in achieving a magnificent environment. Be ours rather to realise the beauties of the cottage kind, and to carefully avoid the cleverness and dodginess of the over-picturesque. Simple, quiet rooms full of that repose which belongs to woods and groves—construction carried out in simple, unostentatious ways, beams where there is weight to be carried, windows where we would have light—the whole breathing of a sweet and simple reasonableness. All these things help to realise the final result which we would achieve.

It is not improbable that the Practical Person will find in the house that is here described nothing more than an affectation of mediævalism.

If it were conceded that it is mediæval to speak true and modern to speak false, then an unfortunate modern who, by some freak of

dream a hall with a marbled wall-paper—and a hatstand!

And the same warning note—"more than this few should seek" is re-echoed as an unspoken comment on all the decoration and furniture of a modern house.

In seeking "more than this" we achieve those reception rooms where we receive nothing but bad impressions and the Cottage with the Curly-Carriage drive. Let us rather set up as an ideal such a humble standard as is implied in the mere omission of the vulgar, and then when our homes are purged of all vulgar and painful things, let us add by slow degrees with careful and exclusive choosing, such few and choice ornaments as may be required. It does not follow that these need be expensive—at

atavism, revived that ancient custom of truthful speaking, might well be spoken of as affecting mediævalism. And it is so with modern building and design—a simple statement, a straightforward piece of work in its modern environment of shams and pretensions, must necessarily stand out glaringly as eccentric and absurd. Its critics have been so long inured to falseness of every description in their surroundings that they have long ago "taken themselves for true," and the plain man is put in the extremely false position of a fantastic eccentric.

What are the methods, one is led to inquire, by which the Practical Person achieves an appropriate environment?

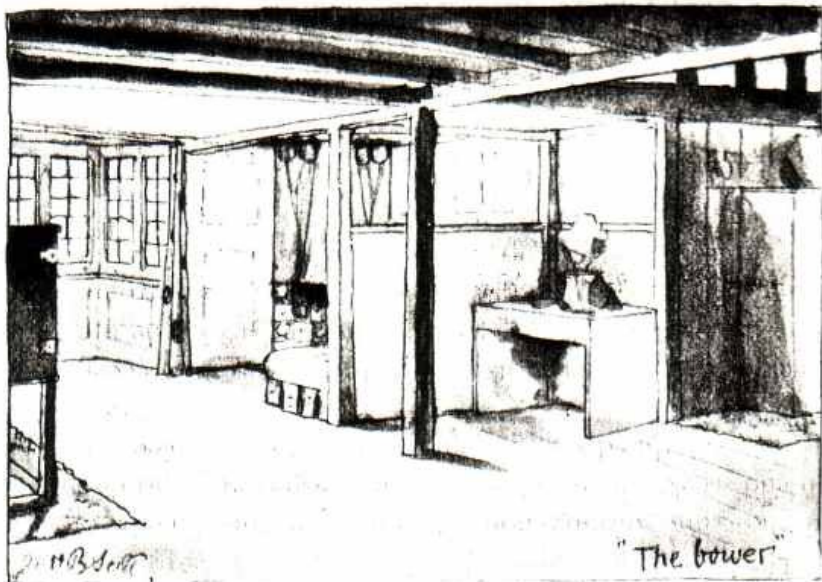
He proceeds to one of the large furniture firms, and there he is free to choose, in the flesh as it



were, his particular rooms. He therefore decides to be jovially Jacobean in his dining-room, nothing if not French in his drawing-room, while when he smokes he will be Oriental, and modern only when he sleeps.

He is cheerfully oblivious of the fact that each of these styles which he attempts to reproduce in the confines of his suburban villa were the outward expression of the soul or spirit of the time which produced them, and that the reasonableness and fitness of each phase depended on the true relation which existed between these outward things and the people who created and lived amongst them. He does not know that Louis Quinze, for instance, was the true symbol of a certain phase of French society which finds no parallel in the frequenters of the suburban drawing-room of to-day.

Resuming the consideration of the home illustrated, and starting again from the hall, the next features to be considered will be the "den" at one end and the children's room at the other.



THE BOWER

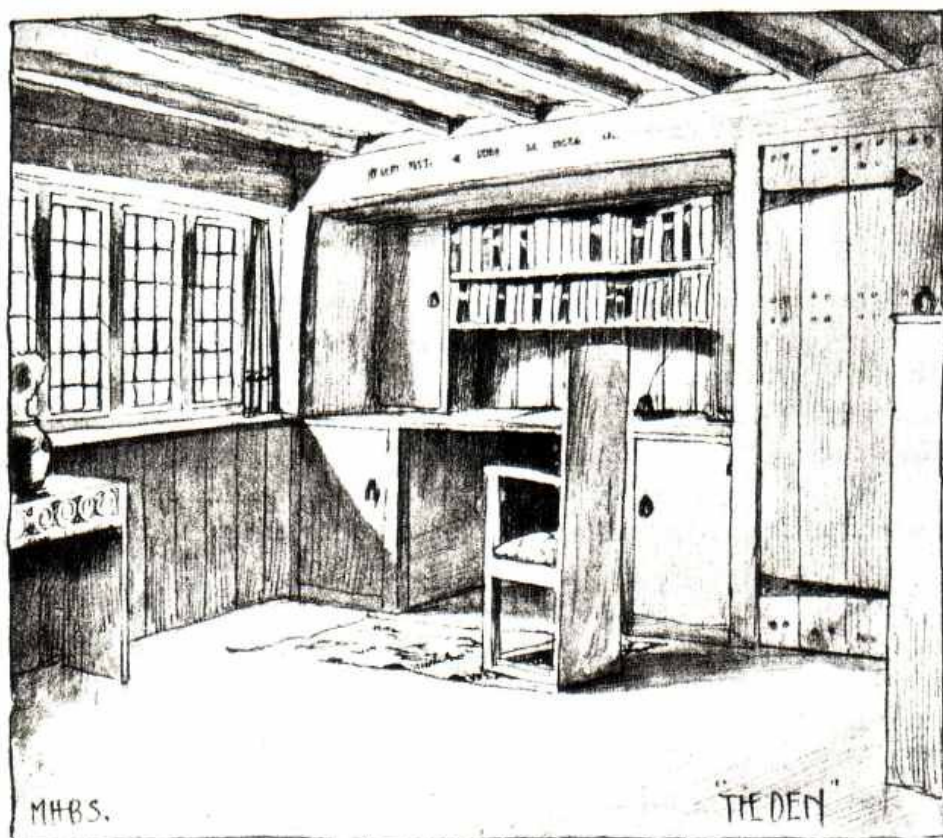
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The former, with its double doors, is entirely cut off from the hall, and is fitted up with writing table and book shelves, as shown in the sketch. The children's room has a porch to the garden, and is also almost completely isolated from the hall. The importance of the consideration of "routes" has already been insisted on in a previous article in *THE STUDIO*.

It will be noted in this connection that visitors

may be shown into the "bower" or the "den" without disturbing the privacy of the hall; that the route of the servants to the front door, the dining-table, and the upper floor is also free of the hall—and that the children can reach the upper floor, garden or refectory without passing through the hall.

One must not omit to mention the obvious adaptability of the hall to festive occasions. The underlying idea of the central focus with its grouped dependencies here exactly meets the requirements of the case, and one need not hesitate as to whether the drawing-room or the dining-room carpet should be taken up for dancing, and one need not deplore the general dis-



THE DEN

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organization of furniture which such a function generally implies.

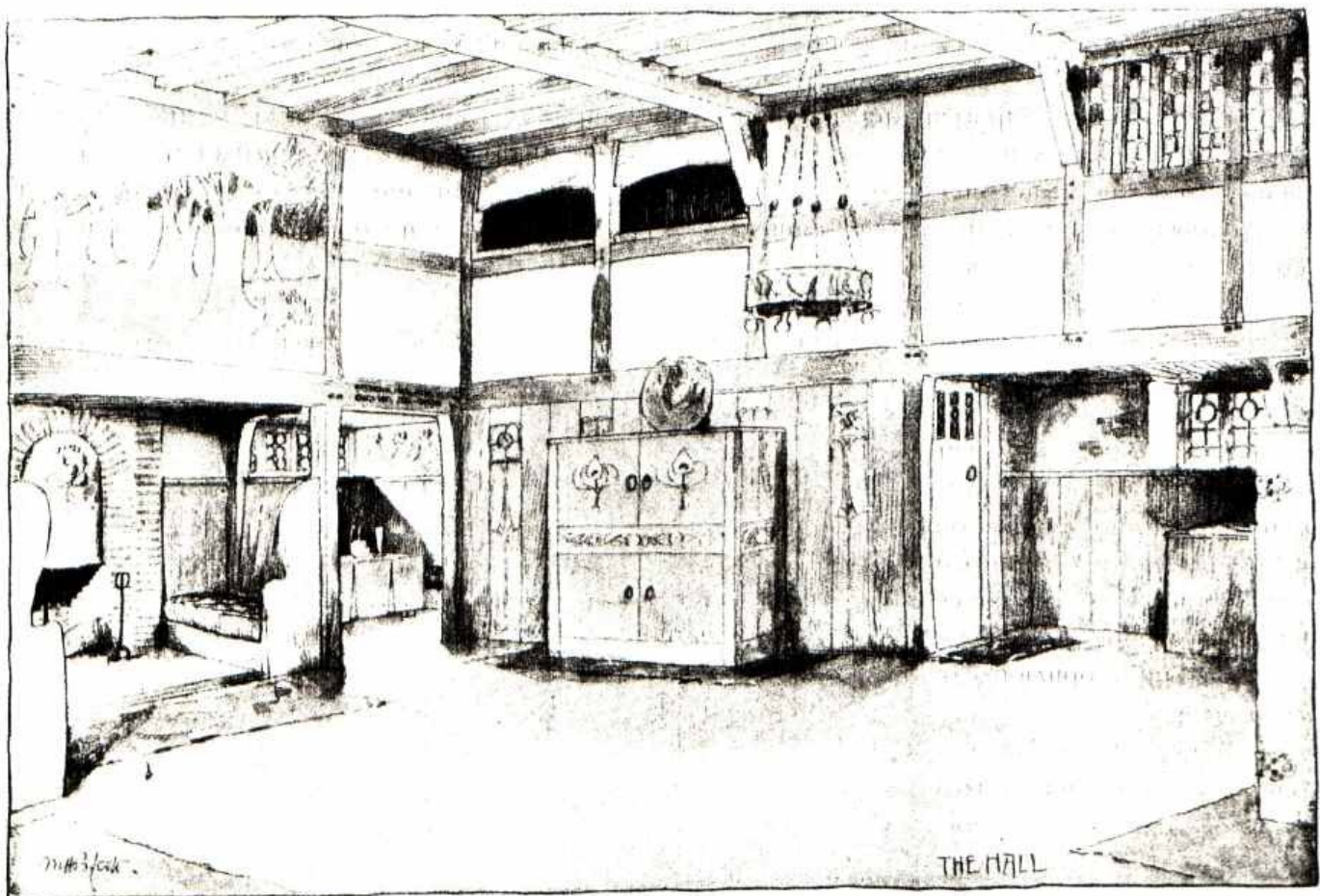
Nowadays, when the cult of simplicity has been taken up to such fell purpose, the bedroom is often a most barren and comfortless apartment. The sanitary expert has decreed that the ideal bedroom is that which most resembles a hospital ward, but although one quite realises the necessity of the study of sanitation in all details of a house, one is loth to let it so usurp the claims of art in the furnishing of the bedroom—and the most robust health would hardly be sufficient compensation for these cheerless surroundings. In the bedroom which is illustrated here an attempt has been made to realise a less rigorous scheme. The bed lined with pink like a seashell, its green coverlet spangled with flowers, like a meadow, and with its blue curtains and white valance decorated with mauve poppies, gives the key-note to the colour scheme of a room which, while not aggressively sanitary, one ventures to hope might lead to pleasant dreaming.

On the same floor there are three other bedrooms and a dressing-room, and each of these would demand a distinctive treatment; while in the roof are the servants' rooms and a boxroom.

The questions of heating and ventilation are

important ones and cannot be entirely solved by the introduction of the open fire-place alone. It is proposed to supplement this in the house under discussion with a system of hot-air heating. By this particular system the cold air enters the chamber in the basement prepared for the purpose, and is there not only heated but moistened before passing to the various rooms. It then rises to the ceiling and descends again into the room till it finally escapes by the chimney flue. By this means a constant current of warm, moist air is secured, and in this way the problems of heating and ventilation are both solved.

It is a common belief that ventilation depends mainly on the cubic capacity of a room, and that the large rooms with high ceilings are therefore necessarily more sanitary in this respect. A consideration of the facts of the case seems to show that, on the contrary, perfectly sanitary conditions as regards ventilation may be secured in the smallest of rooms provided that the air is constantly changed, and that one really gains very little by an increase in the volume of stagnation in a room. The system suggested here, providing as it does for a constant flow of air, must necessarily insure complete ventilation.



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