



PHILIP WEBB designed Rounton Grange for Sir Lowthian Bell in the winter of 1872. His first work was the Red House at Upton, begun in 1859 for William Morris, who made a home there for his bride. As early as 1864 Sir Lowthian had called in Webb to make some additions to Washington, a house in Durham, and from then until Sir Lowthian's death in 1904 these two vigorous and outstanding personalities were much concerned together in building. Sir Lowthian,

indeed, was the steadiest "patron"—the word is used in its best sense—whom Webb found in his long and honourable career.

When he acquired the Rounton property, a farmhouse of no architectural merit stood on the site now occupied by the new house. A scheme of alterations was first devised, but eventually it was decided to rebuild altogether. Both client and architect were determined to use the same site, a decision which it is difficult not to criticise. In order to

secure the accommodation needed without the sacrifice of some fine forest trees, it was necessary to make the building of five storeys. Rounton Grange is full of interest; it is, indeed, one of the landmarks of nineteenth century domestic architecture, but if another and larger available site had been chosen, the air of gauntness, inappropriate to a country house, would have been avoided. In studying the building, it is necessary first to understand Webb's point of view. His early employment in the office of Edmund Street, the architect of the Royal Courts of Justice, had given his mind a Gothic bias, which was confirmed by his close association with William Morris. He was an original member of the Morris firm, which started out with high hopes to reconstitute the artistic crafts of England on a new basis of sincerity and beauty. To that wonderful enterprise he contributed a large number of designs for furniture, glass and the like, and his wonderful understanding of animal forms led him to collaborate in the invention of wallpapers and fabrics. As Professor Lethaby has lately said of Webb, "he was born into a great enthusiasm in the early middle period of the nineteenth century, when he fell in with a group of gifted men, who, in an extraordinary way, became one-minded, so that we cannot tell where the work of one man began and the work of another finished; the work of Webb, Morris and Burne-Jones was so





ROUNTON GRANGE : THE GARDEN FRONT.

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Pre-Raphaelite movement, amid which he lived and worked. Despite his deep friendship and intimate association with Morris, he was too great a man to be confused with his surroundings or to be deflected from his own line of personal development. A man of rare modesty, holding himself aloof from his fellows, marked even, as Mr. Mackail has said, by a "cold austerity," he never sought to influence his generation. He would not allow his drawings to be reproduced; he not only never sought work, but almost shunned it. His sense of the importance, even of the sanctity, of personal work caused him to do almost everything with his own hand. If he had in hand what was for him a large amount of building, he would refuse more, however earnestly pressed upon him.

This grave sense of the high office of the artist was linked with an unworldliness equalled only by his



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vivid independence of character. Money, social pleasures, fame, success, meant nothing to Philip Webb. If his friendships were few, they were of that fine metal which perishes neither with time nor stress of circumstance. On the side of his friends they marked the homage which greatness gathers despite every barrier of reserve. So it is that Philip Webb was the least known of that brave company which affected so greatly the course of artistic development, not only in this country but throughout Europe.

These preliminary words may help to make the reader to see the significance of Rounton Grange. I say significance, rather than beauty or charm, because with all my deep reverence for the work of Philip Webb, I feel that its keynote is to be sought rather in its sincerity and grasp of essentials than in beauty achieved. Webb was one of the pioneers



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SIDEBOARD IN DINING-ROOM.

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who cleared the ground of the wrecks of misunderstood styles with which the first half of the nineteenth century had littered it. He went back to first principles and learned afresh the limitations of materials no less than their ample possibilities. On this foundation truly laid, others have built since with a greater sense of restfulness and perhaps with broader vision of other aspects of their art. His passionate sincerity and the rigid standard by which he measured his own achievement in some sort affected its power to please. Rounton shows this very inflexibility of purpose, a quality great indeed, but not begetting charm.

The house has gone through changes since its first design, and it seems more interesting to reproduce his

domestic quarters in 1896 caused this space to be utilised as a servants' hall.

A much earlier addition had been a conservatory on the east side with access from the dining-room. After Philip Webb had retired from practice Sir Hugh Bell desired to add a big "common room," and this was designed by Mr. George Jack. The old conservatory was remodelled to form a junction room connecting the dining-room with the common room. So much for the chronology of the house.

The fabric has stout walls of ashlar masonry, and the roofs are covered with pantiles with an edging of slate. It is worth noting that Webb's attention was drawn to this characteristic tradition of roof treatment in the North of



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THE COMMON ROOM.

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England by Sir Hugh Bell, and that he adopted it at once. The architectural shape which Webb gave to the house is very characteristic of his outlook. Many of the details, notably those employed on the porch, are markedly Gothic, but that did not prevent him giving a classical feeling to the cornices, and to the little pediments over some of the windows. Of the interiors, the dining-room is by far the most characteristic, and is the more important because its decorative treatment shows him in association with his life-long friends, Morris and Burne-Jones. Over the fireplace is a tablet bearing the following inscription:—

This needle work was invented by
E. Burne Jones and William Morris
and done by Margaret Bell and her
daughter Florence Johnson 1880
and if that any aske me
whether it be he or she
how this booke which is here
shal hatte that I rede you here
it is the Romaunt of the Rose
in which alle the art of love I close.

The frieze on this, the south, side of the dining-room is filled with figures emblematic of the Miseries of Life: Hate, Felony, Vilany, Covertise, Avarice, Envy, Sorrow, Elde, Hypocrisy, Poverty. On the opposite, *i.e.*, the north, side, and above a recess containing a table (itself a noble example of Webb's fine judgment in furniture design), the design consists of dancing figures, symbolising the Beauties of Life: Mirth, Gladness, Beauty, Love, Richesse, Largesse, Franchise, Courtesie. On the west wall the work shows the pilgrim dreaming among the roses in the Garden of Idlesse; on one side he sees himself led by Love, on the other by Danger. The whole scheme is an exquisite expression of the most beautiful of all mediæval dream fancies, and it is no less than a historical monument to the greatest decorative movement which modern times have known. The actual needlework took the late Lady Bell and her daughter eight years. Another of our illustrations shows in detail the very characteristic side-board which Webb designed to occupy the west end of the room.

The last two pictures are devoted to the large addition to the house designed by Mr. George Jack, than whom no more suitable architect could have been employed to complete Philip Webb's work. Mr. Jack was for eighteen years Webb's devoted assistant in all his architectural and decorative activities. The "common room" and the "long room" connecting it with the main body of the house are in perfect

scenes, suggesting the Pleasures of Life. The tympanum of the arch over the fireplace is filled with an interesting scheme of banding in modelled plaster, framing a coat-of-arms.

It is appropriate to refer here to one of Philip Webb's main preoccupations throughout his life, namely, the protection of ancient buildings, and I am permitted to quote from a letter which he wrote to Sir Hugh Bell's father in 1880,



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Sir Lowthian had received an appeal to contribute to the restoration of York Minster, and asked Webb's advice as to whether he should do so. This is what Webb said:

I think you may give as many hundreds of pounds towards the strengthening of this very notable building as your sympathy with it may allow, *if* (and this is important) you can insure that your money will be expended *only* on works for *sustaining the fabric*.

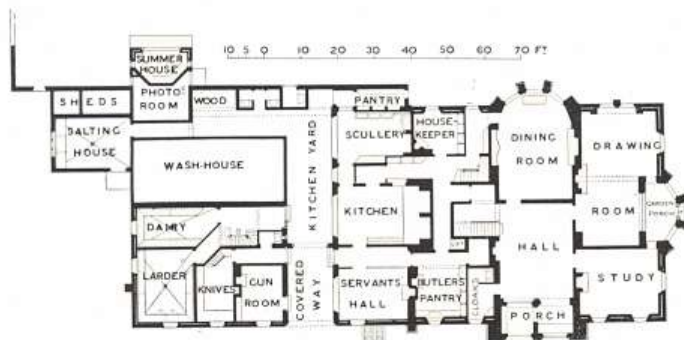
Hundreds of thousands of pounds have been expended on the Cathedrals, the full half of which money has been mischievously used; of recent examples there have been Canterbury, Peterborough, and Chichester, on which a large proportion of the money given by the public has been wasted, in applying incongruous decoration wholly unfitted to the grave and wonderfully beautiful remains of our dignified indigenous art, when the fabrics called for the application of the whole of the money which was got together.

It is but little understood amongst architects how serious a matter it is merely to repair and solidify an ancient building, which is so often just in a state of equilibrium in many of its parts, and requiring attentive watching as each stone is lifted, or additional weight laid on.

It should never be forgotten that dealing with an ancient structure, in the way of sustaining and repairing it, is a wholly different matter to building a new one: "new wine put into old bottles" is a faithful warning.

All this is very sound, and as might be expected from a man who was one of the founders, with William Morris, of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings. It is worth noting that Philip Webb, whose work was so purely individual and so absolutely remote from anything which could be called imitative, was filled with a passion of reverence for every fragment of old work. It marks that devotion to the spirit of the ancient traditions of building which is at its best when combined with a free outlook on the responsibilities of the living artist. His work, like his life, was one long protest against make-believes. For him, art was the vital expression of the ideas and outlook and needs of living people, and not merely a pretty exercise in archæology.

Philip Webb was of a proud and reserved temperament, which not only shrank from any active attempt to influence his generation, but remained, to the last, in ignorance of the enormous influence which he had in fact impressed on the architecture of to-day. Unfortunately, that very genius of retirement which was so characteristic of him has caused not only the amateur of modern building, but even the architects



PHILIP WEBB'S ORIGINAL PLAN FOR ROUNTON.

harmony with the main building, while yet they have individuality enough to mark them as the product of another hand. On the wood chimney-piece are many pretty fancies, carved by Mr. Jack's own hand. The supporting jambs are decorated with little panels emblematic of the Supports of Life, and illustrate different phases of the great iron industries which Sir Hugh Bell directs. Along the frieze are other little

who have been themselves most affected in their work, to be ignorant of the sources of their inspiration. When, however, the history of nineteenth century architecture comes to be written—and it will be a fascinating and difficult enquiry into a welter of opposing motifs—this

much, at least, will have to be made clear, that Philip Webb was not only, in the words of William Morris, “the best man I have ever known,” but one of the most powerful and original architectural thinkers of the nineteenth century.

LAWRENCE WEAVER.

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