

Nunney Castle.

BY MR. C. E. GILES.

THERE are numerous very valuable remains of the domestic architecture of our ancestors in this county, but by far the greater portion dates from the 15th century: the noble ruin of Nunney is one of the few exceptions, by its stern and simple grandeur at once proclaiming itself the work of the Plantagenet era.

The ruins of the castles of England and Wales are chiefly those of buildings which were at one time very extensive,—the residences of the Howards, Percys, Nevilles, and other great feudal lords; but Nunney castle seems to have been the residence of a knight or gentleman. It is stated to have been begun by Sir Elias Delamere, son of Sir J. Delamere, lord of the manor, late in the reign of Edward I, and finished by his grand nephews, John and Jaques Delamere, in the reign of Richard II, who are said to have embellished it with spoils won in the French wars. The building will, I believe, confirm

this statement. The account of it given by Leland in the time of Henry VIII, and quoted by Collinson, affords a complete description of it, when in a perfect state. Leland in the reign of Henry VIII, writes as follows:—"There is a praty castell at the west ende of the parish church, havynge at eche ende by the northe and southe two praty round towers gatheryd by compace to joyne into one. The walls be very stronge and thykke, the stayres narrow, the lodginge within somewhat darke. It standeth on the left risse of the river, [which] dividethe it from the church yarde. The castell is motyd about, and this mote is served by the water conveyed into it oute of the river. There is a stronge waulle without the mote rounde about, savinge at the este part of the castell, where it is defended by the broke."

The engraving will convey a just idea of the exterior as it is at present; the strong wall without the moat exists no longer; the moat is choked with weeds and rubbish, and the walls are shattered and breached.

The interior has suffered more than the exterior; all the floors have been destroyed, and it is rather difficult to say what the original arrangement was. The kitchen was evidently on the ground floor, with probably all the other domestic offices, and perhaps accommodation for men and horses. The hall seems to have occupied the centre portion of the building on the first floor; it was apparently of considerable size, extending the whole width of



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Nunney Castle, Somerset.

the castle, and being lighted by four large windows, which however cannot be earlier than the reign of Richard II. In the south-east tower on the second floor, there is a very perfect example of a domestic chapel of the period; the entrance door is on the western side, opening in a very picturesque and curious manner through the jamb of a deeply recessed window; an arrangement apparently designed to secure the proper orientation of the chapel, which could only be effected by these means. The other window opens eastward; its sill, bracketted out, forms the altar, and is still remaining; a piscina also remains. The difficulty of access at such a height from the ground has prevented this almost unique chapel, as well as other interesting portions of the castle from being properly investigated. It would be certain to repay amply the little time and trouble necessary for a full examination. The turrets were probably covered with conical roofs, and the machicolations are very bold and elegant; the height of the walls to the turrets is 63 feet.

In the civil war it was garrisoned for king Charles I, and had in it a large magazine. Colonel Rainsborough, with his own and colonel Hammond's regiments and two pieces of ordnance, was sent by general Fairfax to take it. On August the 20th, 1645, (on September 8th, according to Collinson) it surrendered on condition of the garrison returning to their homes. It was burnt to prevent its being of any further use to the king.

The effects of the siege are still visible in the shattered walls.

During the siege, the garrison, to delude the besiegers, caused a young porking pig they chanced to have in the castle, to be conveyed into one of the back towers, where its cries could be distinctly heard, and there, pulling him violently by the ears and tail, would have it believed that every day at ten in the forenoon they killed a swine for their fresh provisions.—Unfortunately a deserter from the castle turned the joke against the garrison.

The besiegers having procured a gun (a thirty-six pounder) from Shepton Mallet, battered the thin part of the wall, (probably shewn them by the same deserter) where the staircase led to the upper apartments; and having made a breach, still visible, the garrison were so intimidated that they surrendered. The number of the garrison is stated by some to have been fourteen, by others twenty-four.

Seven of the enemy were killed, and mostly by one marksman, who, watching his opportunity from the turrets, seldom failed to strike his man. The besieged lost none but the above mentioned deserter. One of the besiegers, in contempt of the small garrison, had the audacity to climb a fruit tree in a garden where the manor mansion now stands, to steal the fruit. It was so near the castle that he was brought down by the first shot from the watchful marksman on the walls.