

EAST END OF TAPLOW COURT.

BY FRANK BANFIELD.



APLOW COURT, the Buckinghamshire seat of Mr. W. H. Grenfell, stands on the summit of the end of the range of hills which runs along the River Thames from Maidenhead to Henley. The site of the present

house has been inhabited from the earliest times. As guarding the old ford over the river, it was a place of strategic importance; and the remains of the vallum in the meadow below the house witness to the presence of the Romans in times past, while the tumulus in the old churchyard adjoining the house, raised over the dead body of an ancient Viking, and composed as it is chiefly of chipped flints, supplies plain proof that, previously to the Romans and the Norsemen, the place had for some time been occupied by a primitive flint-age population. The house itself, though portions of it are of great age, has been frequently altered, and only assumed its present aspect when it was to a great extent rebuilt by Mr. Grenfell's grandfather in 1855. The parish church of Taplow used to adjoin the house, but, on its being condemned some years ago, provision was made for the erection of the present church on a more convenient site. The churchyard, however, still remains, and here, within view of the windows of the dining-room, repose Mr. Grenfell's great-grandfather, and father.

"And will you be buried here with them?" I asked Mr. Grenfell.

"With any luck," he replied, a grimly humorous smile mantling his features.

And then I wandered off to some observations about ghosts and doubles; but my host scarcely showed himself sympathetic. The two horseshoes, the greater and the smaller, which I had noticed in the right-hand recess of the entrance-porch, had been fallacious in suggestion.

The Grenfells came originally from Cornwall, and claim among their ancestors men who made great names among the people of the West, to whom the late Charles Kingsley, who married a Miss Grenfell, used to love to trace their pedigree; and the foundations of the family fortune were laid by a small squire, one Pascoe Grenfell, who at the end of the last century started works at Swansea to smelt the Cornish copper ores, and finally fixed upon Taplow as his country place of residence, and erected the tomb to be seen in the old Taplow churchyard. On this I saw it recorded that Mr. Pascoe Grenfell represented Great Marlow in five successive Parliaments—from 1802 to 1820—and as his son, Mr. Charles Pascoe Grenfell, represented Preston, and his son and Mr. Grenfell's father was member for Windsor and Deal and Sandwich, Mr. Grenfell may be said to come of an old Parliamentary family, whose tradition he has himself kept up by representing Salisbury and Hereford in the House of Commons. His mother, too, the daughter of the Right Hon.

W. Sebright and Lady Caroline Lascelles, is a member of a family which has taken no small part in public affairs.

So much then for ancestry. As to Mr. W. H. Grenfell himself, he has attained distinction in more than one walk of life. Athlete, sportsman, war-correspondent, legislator, country gentleman, publicist, and an expert on the currency question, his personality is as attractive and as striking as any to be found in the ranks of our country gentlemen.

The present owner of Taplow Court was born rather more than forty years ago on October 30th, 1855. His preparatory schooling he received at Malvern Wells. In his thirteenth year he not only was *proxime accessit* for a scholarship at Harrow, but, by the death of his father, succeeded to his ancestral estate.

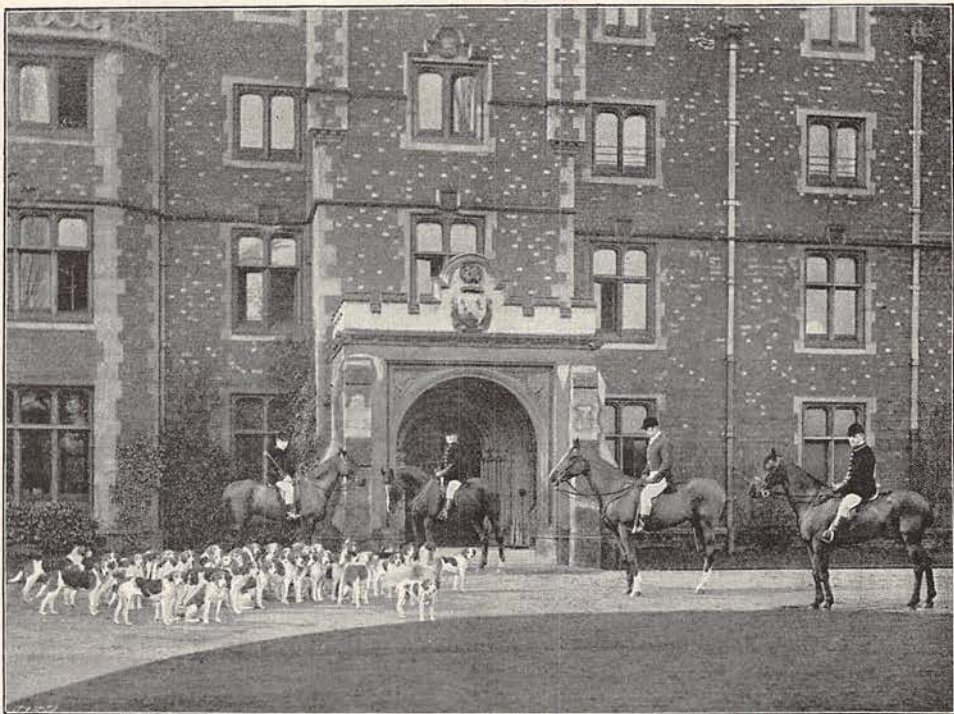
At Harrow he soon became of note, both as an athlete and a cricketer. At the age of eighteen he was the bowler *par excellence* of the school eleven, while his high status as a runner was firmly established. And he was at the same time by no means a laggard with his books.

He entered Balliol in 1874, where his cricketing and athletic reputation had pre-

ceded him. Here he added to his distinction on the track by his prowess on the river. In 1876 he ran against Cambridge in the three miles at the Inter-Varsity sports, beating the Cambridge men, but coming in second to Goodwin, who won the long distance amateur championship of that year. He rowed four in the University Boat Race in 1877, the year of the "dead heat," and in 1878 had the same seat in the boat, when Oxford won. In 1878-79 he was president both of the Oxford University Athletic Club and of the Oxford University Boat Club. It was in the latter year he took his degree, having previously in 1876 obtained a second in Honour Mods.

It was during his Oxford career, in fact just after his success at "Mods," that he prepared a surprise for Alpine guides and established a record in Alpine climbing. In eight days he "did" the Little Matterhorn, Monte Rosa, Rothhorn, the Matterhorn, and the Weisshorn. It is almost needless to observe that this was very smart work indeed.

On the walls of Mr. Grenfell's own "den"—on the left of the entrance hall of Taplow Court—are plentiful photographic portraits of the eights and elevens in which he figured so prominently, as well as pictures of Alpine



MEET OF HOUNDS AT THE FRONT ENTRANCE OF TAPLOW COURT (MR. GRENFELL AS MASTER OF THE PACK IN THE CENTRE OF THE FOREGROUND).

(From a photograph by Russell & Sons, Baker Street, W.)

heights; while in his great central glass-roofed hall, round which the house is built, may be seen oars and tankards, and other mementoes of his physical prowess on the river and the running-path.

And now we come to the period of travel and adventure which succeeded the years on the Thames and Isis. In the earlier portion of it Mr. Grenfell thoroughly familiarised himself with Switzerland and Canada. Three times he stood on the summit of the Matterhorn, and once *pour passer le temps* stroked an Oxford eight across the English Channel.

"Of course," said Mr. Grenfell in reply to a question of mine, "there's no difficulty in getting across the Channel in a broad-beamed boat, but you want an uncommonly calm day to take a sixty-foot long, sliding-seat, out-rigged clinker-built eight to the French shore. Our boat would keep filling, and we had to 'easy' over and over again in order to bale her out. I brought eight jam-pots as balers, and with them we managed to keep her fairly empty. She was so long, you see, that she wouldn't rise over the waves."

Another achievement of Mr. Grenfell's is the swimming twice across Niagara from the American to the Canadian shore, quite close to where the fall strikes the water below and fills the air with spray. According to my host it was mainly a matter of keeping the legs up during the swim so as to avoid the eddies locally known as "flams."

"The second time I did it," said he, "I was for a while in a terrible funk, I can tell you, for I got in the backwash, and could feel it carrying me in under the falls."

On two occasions Mr. Grenfell went on hunting expeditions into the Rocky Mountains. On the first of these, in 1884, he was accompanied by his friend the Hon. Gilbert Leigh. In the Bighorn Mountains, Wyoming, wandering out of camp in pursuit of game, he got lost. Here is his own description of his second night of solitude, as written out by himself. Read amid the luxurious surroundings of Taplow Court, the narrative had its special piquancy:—

"The sun is getting low again! There is no help for it, there must be another night spent in the dark and cold. However, I cannot spend it here on this top exposed to the wind and without water. At the bottom of the next cañon there is the sparkle of a clear cool stream, and wood in plenty for the fire. Better there than here, where the sun has baked the earth as hard as a stone. So I climb and slip down the steep side of the great cañon, and at last reach the bottom and prepare for the night. On my way

down, I passed several thick bushes of wild raspberries, which were better than nothing, but were not very satisfying.

"What a place for a bear! But no bear appears. A bear would provide aldermanic banquets for some time to come; but the only signs of animal life to be seen are



MR. W. H. GRENFELL, OF TAPLOW COURT, IN 1891.
(From a photograph by Wiele & Klein, Madras.)

gigantic elk horns, white and glistening, lying where they had been cast in the spring. How clear and cold the stream is! I lie across it and take long gulps at the water; if there is not too much to eat, there is at all events plenty to drink—and then bathe my feet in its clear depths; after that collect the wood, and prepare for the dreary night.

"The fire is soon set going, and the grouse produced out of my pocket. The next thing is—not being well-versed in the culinary art—how to cook it? After one or two attempts with a long stick, with one end firmly fixed in the ground, and a pocket-handkerchief, a good substitute for a spit is arranged, and the bird dangles over the wood-embers, while I sit by with my hands round my knees, and now and then give the handkerchief a twirl; but although I have had no food for some forty hours, I feel too dispirited to care for so scanty a meal, and a very small portion suffices, and the remains are carefully wrapped up in the handkerchief and put by for breakfast next morning.

"And now begins the second night, a night infinitely more dreadful than the first—more dreadful because more hopeless. The first was bad enough; it is not exhilarating

to pass any night without shelter, food, or companion, but the first night there was always hope: there was the hope of reaching the valley and of finding human beings. But now it had been reached, and denied all help; and here I am a second night at the bottom of a gloomy cañon, not knowing which way to go—one way being no better than another—and apparently in a country absolutely devoid of human beings. Through the long dark hours there is time for many thoughts. The cold becomes intense, sleep is impossible as before, for the wood burns out so quickly that one has to be constantly piling it on; if one dozes for a minute or two the sharp frost soon reminds one of one's duty to the fire.

"The sides of the cañon are perpendicular and narrow. The moon rises over them, and again seems set in the sky, so slowly do the moments pass. The same thoughts occur over and over again. What a fool, I own, to die here slowly of starvation when I might have been comfortable in camp, or, better still, at home in bed! Why did I go out alone to die here like a rat in a trap, when I felt so strong and well? Why did I come out at all to die three thousand miles away from home with impotent rage at my heart? How do men die here of starvation? Wandering on, tumbling over rocks and into streams, till reason vanishes, and then strength fails them? But what a prospect! To feel one's self getting weaker and weaker, but so slowly!—and those endless lonesome nights! How many of them could one pass through, while the cruel moon stands still above one's head?

"Then would come fits of anger and bitterness, and my hand would instinctively feel my pocket to find if the two precious cartridges were still safe, which I had put by in case the worst should come to the worst—anything is better than to die inch by inch like this."

"Seven days later," said Mr. Grenfell sadly, "we were hunting for my companion as he had been hunting for me, and for a week searched for that which we dreaded to find, and which, when we did find it, was all that remained of one of the truest and bravest Englishmen who have ever been taken by the love of adventure to the far-off Rocky Mountains."

The Honourable Gilbert Leigh was found dead at the foot of a precipice, down which he had fallen when out hunting alone.

But it was not only in the Bighorn Mountains, amid the cañons of the Rockies, that Mr. Grenfell came near the loss of his life. The next time it was amid confused crowds

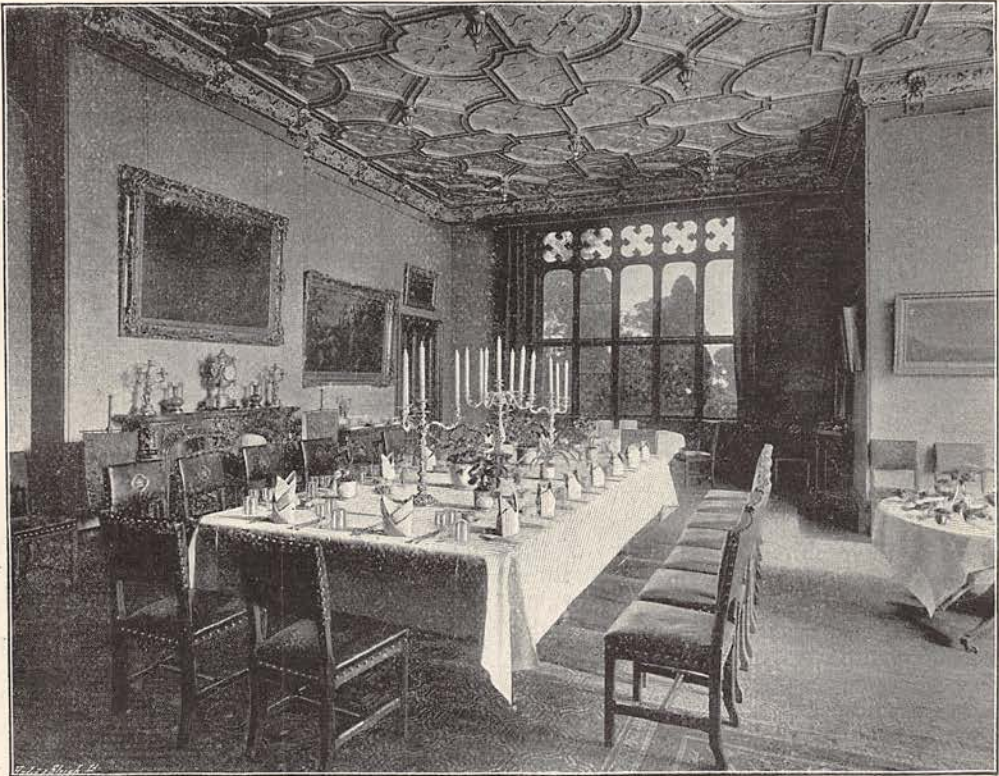
and a fearful hubbub that his career ran a risk of reaching an untimely close; a dramatic contrast to the solitudes and silences of the American adventure.

It was in January, 1885, when the world was anxiously awaiting news of Gordon from the Desert Column that Mr. Grenfell was minded to try his fate in the Soudan. Failing in an attempt to get a berth in the mounted infantry, he determined to go out as a civilian. Happily bethinking him of the proprietor of the *Daily Telegraph*, with whom he was acquainted, he called on Sir Edward Lawson, and that brilliant and distinguished journalist secured him an appointment as war-correspondent of the great Fleet Street journal. Six weeks later Mr. Grenfell was at Suakim just in time for the battle of Hasheen. Two days afterwards, on March 22nd, 1885, occurred the affair of M'Neill's zareba, where he had another narrow squeak for his life. I will avail myself of Mr. Grenfell's kind permission, and make a tolerably copious extract from the private diary in which he recorded his impressions at the time.

"March 22nd, Sunday.—Early in the morning General M'Neill, commanding the second brigade, and General Hudson, commanding the Native (Indian) contingent, started with orders to advance in the direction of Tamaai, and to build two zarebas in preparation for a general advance of the army on Tamaai. The force which went out was composed of the Berkshire under Colonel Huysshe, a most gallant regiment commanded by a most gallant officer, the Marines with four Gardners, the Sikhs, the 23rd Bombay Native Infantry, the 17th Native Infantry, with a small and insufficient cavalry escort, and 860 camels, 100 mules, carrying water and provisions, doolie bearers and a mixed lot of native drivers and syces, etc., who were under little control. Phil Robinson, Fripp of the *Graphic*, and Paget of the *Illustrated* started with me about two hours afterwards. After clearing the left water fort and getting into the bush, we met the General and his staff returning after giving final directions to the convoy. General Greaves, the Chief of the Staff, rode up to us, and informed us of the direction which the convoy had taken, and at the same time said that he would not answer for our reaching it in safety. We determined to push on, and after going a couple of miles saw the dust raised by the advancing force. We went along the field wire, which they laid as they proceeded, and soon sighted the heads of some mounted men. 'Friends or foes' was now the question, and we rode on, stopping now and then to reconnoitre with our glasses. Coming to the conclusion that

the men seen were friends, we rode on and soon came upon the Native Infantry, who were marching in squares with the camels, etc., in the middle. Passing through them, we joined the British square, which soon halted. Proceeding to the telegraph cart, we found General M'Neill on the eve of sending off a message to headquarters, which he said he did not object to our hearing. It was to

and were cutting bushes and dragging them in to form the square. Two sandbag redoubts to hold two Gardners each were being constructed by the Naval Brigade. The work grew apace, and there was no sign of an attack of the enemy. Inside the rapidly-rising zareba water was being served out to the men, camels were being unloaded, and the water tents filled. This went on for two hours.



THE DINING ROOM AT TAPLOW COURT.

(From a photograph by Gillman & Co., Oxford.)

the effect that as the camels were so badly packed during the night and kept falling out and losing their loads, he and General Hudson had come to the conclusion that it was impossible to construct two zarebas and send the empty convoy home before dark. The answer returned from headquarters was that the General hoped that his instructions would be carried out. General M'Neill replied that it was impossible to make two zarebas before nightfall, and determined as the ground was suitable to build a zareba where he was and send the convoy home. What cavalry there was, was sent out as vedettes, and the work of building the zareba commenced. Half the men had their coats off and their arms piled,

Not a sound betrayed the close proximity of the enemy, who were meanwhile creeping up from bush to bush in thousands to make ready for a final rush. The camels were brought up to be loaded preparatory to starting. At three o'clock the convoy was going back guarded by the Sikhs and Native Infantry. Phil Robinson and myself intended to go back with it. I had just watered my pony Beelzebub, and was leading him towards where the convoy were assembling, when with fiendish yells the enemy were upon us. The vedettes, who escaped, galloped in among them. There was no square, and two sides of the zareba were not finished. Many of the men had their arms piled, and were cutting



MRS. GRENFELL'S BOUDOIR.

(From a photograph by Marsh Bros., Henley.)

bushes in their shirt sleeves. Two of the Gardner guns were not mounted, but those of the *Sphinx* and *Carysfoot* were in working order. The men rushed to their arms, and a tremendous fire was opened on all sides. Every mule and camel driver and all the camels and mules stampeded. The dust made by the flying men and animals, together with the smoke of the firing, made it impossible to see. I found myself among the camels, the long lines of which, stampeding like a Noah's ark let loose, made it impossible to get back to the zareba. A heavy fire was opened in our direction from our own men which made return out of the question. The Arabs came through and round the zareba, cutting and stabbing men and animals, and, owing to the number of Indians and native camel and mule drivers, it was hard to distinguish friend from foe. My horse soon went head over heels, and I lost him in the bush. I was totally unarmed, and had to trust to my legs, which fortunately served me in good stead. An Arab behind me fired three shots at me as he pursued, but fortunately missed. After going some little way, I had the luck to catch a horse, and so got along towards Suakim. The way was lined with fugitives, and there were bodies of the enemy

on the right and left. I got into the town, and was quietly riding over the causeway, when Robinson came up, having escaped on his horse in the same manner."

Mr. Grenfell further told me that he had only his umbrella with him in the event of a hand-to-hand encounter. He was knocked down six times in the crush of camels, carts, camp-followers, and rushing Arabs.

"It was like making your way through a regular Derby squash," said he. "There were some seven hundred camels killed in the rush. Fourteen hundred dead bodies of the enemy were counted round and close to the zareba. One hundred and forty-seven were killed hand-to-hand inside, one hundred being pulled out of one corner."

"Were M'Neill's zareba and Hasheen the only two fights you were in?"

"No," said Mr. Grenfell, "I was in two convoy fights afterwards. Those were all the important engagements—viz. Hasheen, M'Neill's zareba and the two convoy fights—and those practically settled all the dervishes who really meant business: that is, the fanatic followers of the Mahdi, who courted death and hurled themselves on the squares in religious frenzy."

Two years later Mr. Grenfell married Miss

Ethel Fane, the only daughter of the Hon. Julian Fane, of the house of Westmoreland. By this lady, who combines many charms of person and character, he is the father of three children, a girl of two and two handsome boys, who give promise of winning distinction for themselves in open-air sports.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Grenfell visited India in the winter of 1891-92, and were the guests of Lord and Lady Harris at Bombay, Lord and Lady Wenlock at Madras, and the Viceroy and the Marchioness of Lansdowne further north. Here they spent a very enjoyable time, Mr. Grenfell getting some elephant and other shooting in the South-Eastern Presidency. They also visited the Maharajah of Kuch Behar, where they played lawn-tennis and went tiger-shooting.

Mr. Grenfell has become prominently identified with the Bimetallist movement, and it was largely owing to the strong and convinced views he held and still holds on this subject that he resigned his seat in the House of Commons for Hereford in the summer of 1893.

I asked Mr. Grenfell in what question he

took most interest, and he promptly replied, "The currency question. It affects the whole world," and as we strolled out through the beautiful grounds which stretch some mile and a half along the lofty bank of the Buckinghamshire shore of the Thames, two hundred and thirty feet above high-water mark, he talked freely about his hobby. To call it a "fad" is absurd where almost every professor of political economy, seven directors of the Bank of England, a large proportion of the leading bankers, and many of our most eminent statesmen are convinced of the desirability of a return to the free coinage of silver, of the ruin which may else befall our commerce and trade. We talked of the debt of India to England, which has been practically doubled through the depreciation of the rupee, of the coming competition of Eastern labour with our own, a labour made a hundred per cent. more dangerously cheap owing to the calamitous results which have ensued from the demonetisation of silver by the western nations in 1873. And I listened with especial interest, as I knew that Mr. A. J. Balfour was coming down to Taplow Court later in the day for a



THE GREAT GLASS-ROOFED CENTRAL HALL,
(From a photograph by Gillman & Co., Oxford.)



THE CEDAR AVENUE.

(From a photograph by Marsh Bros., Henley.)

two nights' visit, and as the International Bimetallic Conference summoned at Paris by M. Théry was to take place in the following week, it was easily to be imagined that Mr. Grenfell and his expected guest would soon be immersed in far-reaching counsel. But it is perilous to attempt to give even a *résumé* of a conversation on economic topics from memory; so I will say no more about it.

Presently, as we strolled past a tall deodar down into the magnificent cedar avenue, I asked Mr. Grenfell what might be his favourite authors. "Well," said he, "I read different things at different times. Last time I was in the Rocky Mountains, I took Milton and Scott, and I read through Milton three times, including the Latin. I certainly shouldn't read him here in the middle of the London season in the midst of all the bustle and movement, but out there in the solitude and absolute quiet, when you read by the light of a candle stuck on a stick, it is different. *There* you want something you can read over and over again, as you cannot take many books, and only the best stuff will stand the absolute quiet and stillness of a Rocky Mountain night.

Mr. Grenfell was anxious that I should not give the impression that he wished to proclaim in any priggish fashion a preference for the monumental achievements of our literary giants. What he meant was that, on an expedition where one must be for months a stranger to the world of books and intellectual life, one is best advised to take only such literature as will come well out of the test of frequent reperusal; that with books as with men the companion for an idle half-hour may be more lightly chosen than the one on whom reliance must be placed for many a long and lonely vigil over long spaces of time far away from the ordinary haunts of men.

In answer to another remark of mine, he said, "Men had to read at Balliol, because Jowett would have sent a man down if he thought he was idling."

Our stroll had now brought us to the "root-house," a round and lofty summer-house, in which a dozen people could lounge comfortably on a summer's day. It is built entirely of tree-roots. Just in front of its entrance an iron railing protects the unwary visitor from accidents. Sheer down, so steeply as to amount almost to a precipice, the ground sinks to the River Thames. There through the tree stems and branches two hundred feet below one can just make out the roof of Mr. Grenfell's boathouse, the starting-point

of those punting excursions which from 1888 to 1890 made him champion of the Thames and Upper Thames. The waters darkle below there, while just beyond the tree-tops they make a line of rustling silver as they sweep over Boulter's Weir. And away past the villas dotted here and there on the further bank, the Berkshire country stretches out mile after mile to where the sky-line is broken by hills. It is a view and an outlook to linger in the memory, though the foreground is not alive with bright greenery as when I saw it last three summers since.

In the grounds on the north of the house Mr. Grenfell has built him a covered tennis-court with a comely gallery. It is a large and substantial building, and in the summer time he places it at the disposal of the school children who come to Taplow. Six hundred can be seated at tea here. In the gallery, where, from cosy lounges, visitors can follow the fortunes of the tennis players below, there are many trophies made up of quaint oriental arms upon the walls, and also an inscription which tells you that all the wood used in the construction of this gallery was brought from Yeneseisk, in Central Siberia.

As the antechamber to the tennis-court is a gymnasium, in which there is arrayed everything necessary for athletic exercises in wet weather, including fencing-foils and a punching ball. In front of this last my companion stopped short, and for the space of a minute shot out his left and right in good sportsman-like style, waking up the punching-ball to such aggressive retorts that I retired hurriedly to a safe distance.

"Have you ever had occasion to apply practically your pugilistic accomplishment?" I asked.

"No," said he; "never."

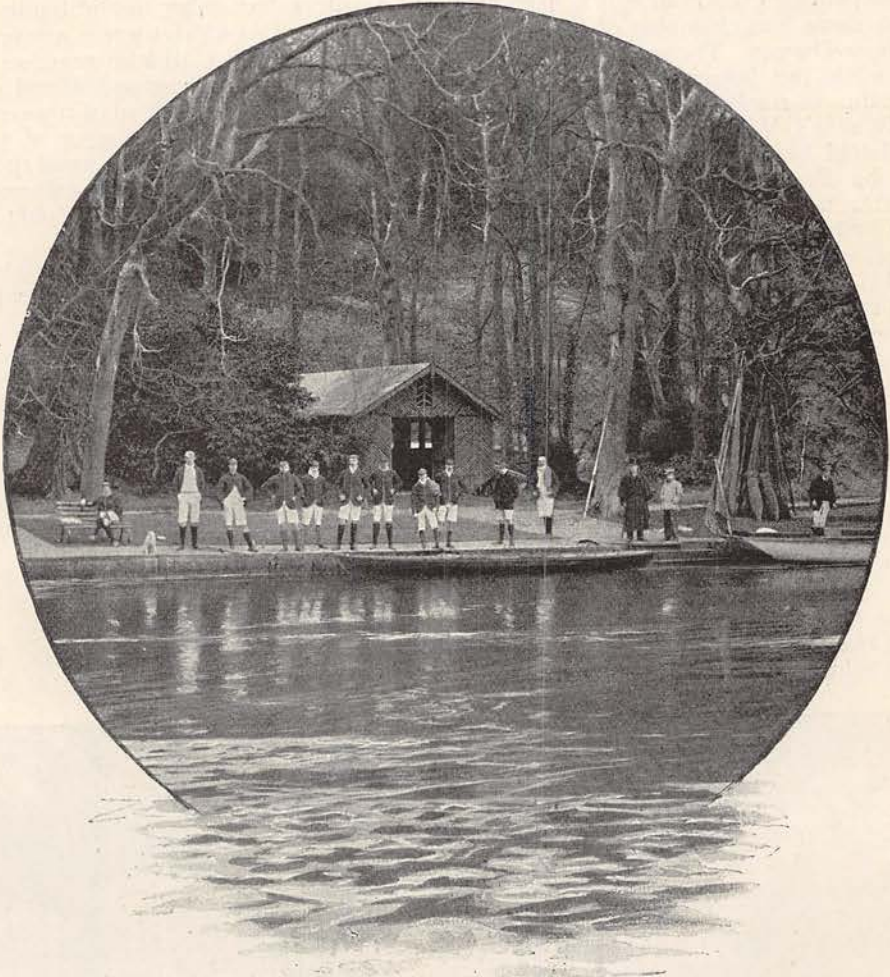
"Ah," said I regretfully, "I suppose it's a proof of the strong man armed keeping his goods in peace."

But with a good-natured smile for my Scriptural lore he led me to the south side of the house, where are the tombs of his three immediate progenitors. From the edge of this disused grave-yard a verdant sweep of smooth grass stretches some mile or so in abrupt declivity to Maidenhead away below. This did not arrest my eyes so much as one small reach of the Thames, which glittered one sheet of gold as it caught



THE DRAWING ROOM.

(From a photograph by Gilman & Co., Oxford.)



A BOATING GROUP (MR. GRENFELL AND AN OXFORD EIGHT).
 (From a photograph by Gillman & Co., Oxford.)

the December sun, and emphasised the darker hues of the distant alder-stems and the meadows. Mr. Grenfell's sires lie round a mound of smooth cut grass, thirteen feet high and two hundred and forty-three feet in circumference. This mound, which has been a landmark for more than ten centuries, is responsible for the name Taplow, which signifies "a mound upon a hill." Twelve years ago Mr. Grenfell had its contents investigated, and then it was ascertained beyond a doubt that here had been interred some Viking prince of name and fame. A number of gold bands, buckles, wristlets, and other handsome ornaments in gold and silver, a lot of Venetian glass and what-not were found inside. The whole *trouvaille* went to the British Museum, and the contents of the mound formed the

subjects of elaborate drawings in one of the principal illustrated weeklies in October, 1883.

As we came back to the front of Taplow Court, I paused to contemplate the statue, which adorns the circular lawn, round which goes the broad entrance drive.

"George III.," said I, "is it not, and in the costume of a Roman warrior?"

"Yes," said Mr. Grenfell. "His Majesty sent it as a gift—a sort of photograph, you know, to my great-grandfather."

Mr. Grenfell's home is plentifully decorated with the trophies of the chase, more than fifty antlers of red deer adorning the walls of his own special room alone. This apartment, no less than the library, contains good store of books, while Taplow Court possesses not a few fine paintings.