



*From a photograph by John R. Singer, Chippenham.*

THE FRONT ENTRANCE, CORSHAM COURT.

## LORD METHUEN AT CORSHAM COURT.

WHEN Lord Methuen at the outbreak of the war was placed in command of the First Division of Sir Redvers Buller's Army Corps, he had only been in residence at his ancestral home at Corsham Court for a year, as his duties as Commander of the Home District had kept him in London since 1892.

Since he entered into possession of his estate, Lord Methuen has spent large sums on improvements in building model cottages for the workpeople and interesting himself in various parish schemes. Lady Methuen is greatly beloved for the sympathetic interest which she takes in the various benevolent and philanthropic schemes of the parish.

Corsham Court is a fine specimen of an old Elizabethan mansion. As you approach it through the long avenue of towering elms, the bold front, consisting of a centre and two

jutting wings, presents an old-time picture, with its many pointed gables and rows of mullioned windows. Two magnificent cedars stand on either side the approach to the entrance. High hedges of closely cropped yew wind round the lower end of the front court near the stables, which are picturesque Elizabethan buildings covered with creepers. The incessant cawing of a colony of rooks, whose ancestors, if not mentioned in Domesday Book, have doubtless every claim to be, alone breaks the stillness. The old church stands within the park gates, and its handsome modern spire rises picturesquely amongst the ancestral trees. Around it lies the graveyard, where the "rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep"; and one of these achieved the distinction, as his tomb records, of having cut three sets of teeth.

The nave of the church probably dates

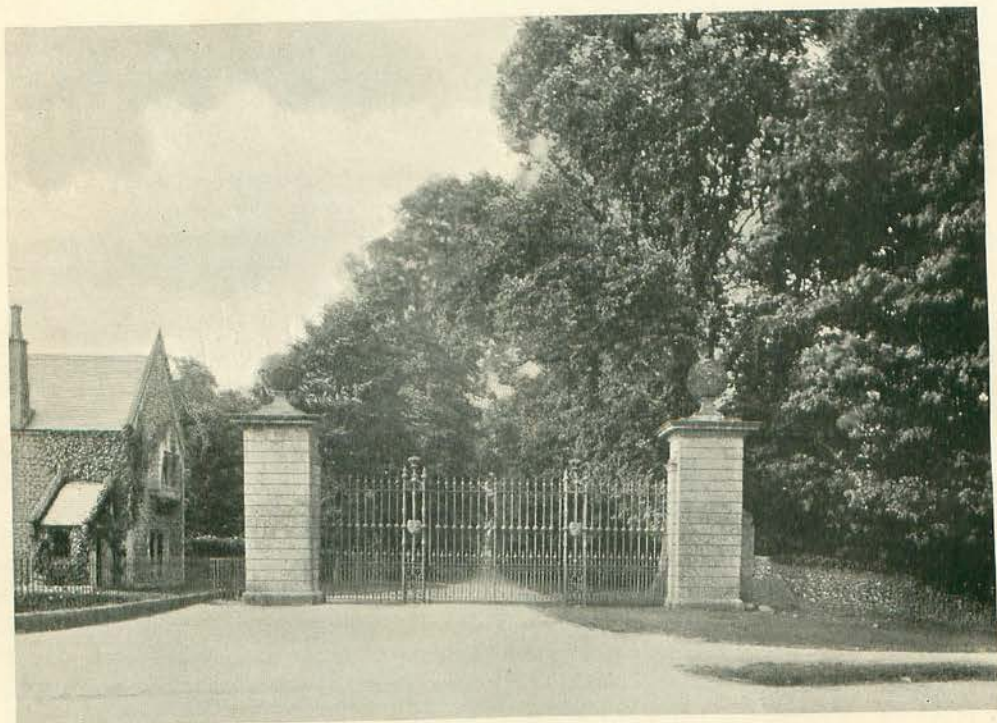


back a thousand years. Evidences of its antiquity are seen in two double pillars at the west end, an ancient stone font, the open-ribbed oak beams, and the inclination of the chancel towards the north. This peculiar leaning, as shown in the illustration, was sometimes adopted in early churches because our Saviour is supposed to have died with His head towards the north. This is the view held by Mr. Dunlap, the Vicar of Corsham, to whose courtesy I am also indebted for information regarding the quaint institutions which connect the Manor with feudal times. When the church was restored and the galleries removed, the old court pew went also, and Lord Methuen's father built a small private chapel on one side of the church for the accommodation of himself and family.

Although the date above the entrance of Corsham Court is 1582, it does not represent the antiquity of the Manor, which existed in Anglo-Saxon times. The Manor House is not a "court" by courtesy, as it stands upon the site of the old palace of the kings

who, under the Heptarchy, ruled the kingdom of Wessex. Lord Methuen still receives a yearly payment of a penny from every tenant on his estate, in recognition of his right to feudal service. According to the ancient custom, each householder must answer to his name when called by the lord of the Manor, or be taxed. The yearly penny paid by rich and poor alike is virtually a tax on the householders for not answering to their names. In days gone by there would have been much mounting in hot haste, at such a crisis as the present, amongst the good people of Corsham, for the baron would have bade his retainers follow him to the war. Let the people who rebel at paying their penny lay this to heart as they repose in the comfort of their homes, instead of lying out on the veldt by the Modder River, as their liege lord is doing.

The township still retains its own coroner, independent of the county, and upon a certain day in October a court-leet dinner is given at the Methuen Arms. The guests consist of the coroner, judge, solicitor, chaplain (vicar



*From a photograph by John R. Singer, Chippenham.*

THE LODGE GATES, CORSHAM COURT.



of the parish), a medical man, and twelve parishioners representing the grand jury. In a room below, the common jury dine off beef and beer, and in olden times the hangman and turnkey shared their revels. Other survivals of past ages linger in the Manor which Lord Methuen holds.

The curfew still "tolls the knell of parting day," but the parishioners do not put out their fires and lights.

Close to the south entrance of the Court is a picturesque row of six almshouses and a free school, which were

dowered in 1672 by Margaret, widow of Sir Edward Hungerford, commander of the Wiltshire forces for Parliament. The Hungerford family of Farleigh Castle purchased Corsham Court at the beginning of the fifteenth century. The almshouses are now under the

control of Lord Radnor. The modern Radicalism of Corsham presents a strong contrast to its ancient state of feudalism.

Although a sound Churchman himself, Lord Methuen maintains an attitude of the greatest friendliness with the various

Dissenting bodies in the parish. A desire to live peacefully with all men seems to be the distinguishing trait of the present lord of Corsham—a cultivated, refined, kindly, sympathetic man, simple in tastes, frugal in living, and devoted to his home and



*From a photograph by Gabell & Co., Ecclestone Street, S.W.*

LADY METHUEN.

family, thus forming a remarkable contrast to some of the former race of bluff country squires of the Western Marshes.

Lieutenant-General Paul Lord Methuen was born September 1, 1845, and entered the Army at twenty-one as lieutenant of the



Scots Guards. For several generations the heir of the Methuens has borne the name of Paul. Corsham Court was purchased in 1746 by Paul Methuen, Esquire. One of his ancestors was Sir Paul Methuen, the notable Ambassador to Madrid, to whom Corsham Court owes a large portion of its priceless treasures and pictures. Another ancestor of Lord Methuen's was John Methuen, Chancellor of Ireland and the framer of the "Methuen Treaty" with Portugal in regard to port wine. The present lord has always been familiarly known amongst his *confrères*, and, indeed, throughout the Service, as Paul Methuen.

Soldiering has been Lord Methuen's en-

thusiasm from his youth upwards. He did not enter the profession as a dilettante idler, and has always been at pains to study his work, and eager for active service in the field, although, as the heir to a large estate, he might have been content to wear his uniform at home. So many sketches of his military career have been written that it is unnecessary to go into detail beyond stating that within four years of joining the Service he obtained the coveted honour of being a Guards' adjutant. His old regiment, the Scots Guards, is now with him in South Africa. He received his baptism of fire at the battle of Amoafu during the Ashanti War of 1874. Eight

years later he did good service on the staff of Sir Garnet Wolseley in the Tel-el-Kebir Campaign; but his most brilliant distinction was gained in 1884-5, as the commander of "Methuen's Horse" in Sir Charles Warren's Bechuanaland force, and in that period he gained familiarity with the country where he has achieved the early successes which were gained at the beginning of the present campaign—the victories of Belmont, Enslin, and the Modder River.

From 1892-7 Lord Methuen was in command of the Home District. His interest in the Volunteer Movement had always been strong, and he applied himself to his new office with great determination. The wisdom of the course he adopted is apparent now that, for the first time, the Volunteers have gone on active service.

Lord Methuen has shown considerable perspicuity in promoting the military training of young England in time of peace, little thinking that the call to arms would come upon the country so soon. Years ago, when simple Colonel



From a photograph by John R. Singer, Chippenham.

THE INTERIOR OF CORSHAM CHURCH, SHOWING CHANCEL LEANING TO NORTH.



*From a photograph by Gregory & Co., Strand*

GENERAL LORD METHUEN, K.C.V.O.





*From a photograph by John R. Singer, Chippenham.*

METHUEN'S FAVOURITE TREE IN THE FLOWER GARDEN.

Methuen, he took a great interest in the Whittington Club at Whitechapel when the Cadet Corps was started, and often spent an evening with the boys, to whom he was a great hero, with his tall figure—six feet odd—and a fine soldierly bearing. He has since taken an active interest in the organisation of the Boys' Brigade at Corsham.

Lord Methuen is a great walker. He rises at six o'clock in the morning, and when at Corsham may be seen going round portions of his estate before breakfast. When in London this habit continues with him, and on Volunteer field days his commanding form was to be seen striding over the ground well in advance of his party.

When Lord Methuen only walked, there was some limit to his powers of overlooking in unexpected places; but his long bicycle rides struck terror into the breasts of careless subordinates, for they made him ubiquitous. A stern and unflinching exaction of duty has characterised him in every office which he

has held; but men will take strict measures from one who never spares himself, and that Lord Methuen has never done. Courtesy and utter absence of "superior" airs are distinguishing traits in his character. He is what men call a "thorough good fellow"—honest and upright in all his dealings, considerate to subordinates who are not of the lackadaisical order, willing to share the hardships of his men,—which has been proved by his manner of living at the Modder

River camp,—and gentle and courteous to women.

Every kind of athletic sport seems to come to him by nature. Fencing is his great hobby, and he recommends sword practice to men who wish to keep old age at bay. "The foil," he said on one occasion, when presiding over a fencing display, "helps to keep a man much younger than his recorded age." He is an adept at the various pastimes of a country gentleman—shooting, hunting, fishing. One of his chief delights is salmon-fishing in Scotland. He is also an expert swimmer, and on one occasion made a gallant rescue of a man from drowning. It was during the period when Lord Methuen was Military Attaché at Berlin. He was passing one of the Prussian canals, when he saw a would-be suicide leap into the water. Quick as thought, Lord Methuen jumped into the water, and succeeded in bringing the man to land. For this act of bravery the German Emperor presented him with a medal. The decoration was



conferred upon Lord Methuen at a State Ball in Berlin in presence of a brilliant assembly, including the Diplomatic Corps.

During his residence at Berlin, Lord Methuen made a study of German war tactics, which should be serving him in good stead in dealing with a foe reputed to be instructed by German officers. The latter describe the General of the First Division as the "Baron Methuen."

Lady Methuen was Miss Mary Ethel Sanford, daughter of William Ayshford Sanford, of Nynehead. Her marriage took place in 1884, and during the succeeding years she accompanied Lord Methuen wherever his duties called him. She knows South Africa well; has ever been a true soldier's wife, ready to accept whatever comes without complaint, and is quite independent of social excitements. Her five children are named respectively Paul Ayshford (a fine boy of thirteen, now at Eton), Ethel Christian, Anthony Paul, Ellen Seymour, and Laurence Paul. It is a point of interest to note that Lord Methuen fought his first battle in the present campaign—the victory of Belmont—on the sixth birth-

day of his little daughter Seymour, which gave the occasion a double celebration at Corsham.

During the absence of her husband, Lady Methuen is living quietly with her children at Corsham. She is President of the Wiltshire branch of the Soldiers and Sailors' Families

Association, and throughout the winter has been forwarding cases of clothing weekly to the soldiers of Lord Methuen's division. Lady Methuen has not spared herself in this matter, having generously made Corsham Court the headquarters for the reception of the parcels of clothing,—and what that means only ladies who have given up their homes to a similar influx can understand. All these parcels indicate a heavy correspondence; and although Lady Methuen has

received much help from the vicar's wife and other ladies of Corsham and district, her own work has been very great.

If Lady Methuen can be said to indulge in a hobby, I think it is a fondness for the antique; and her beautiful and stately home, with its artistic treasures, is a never-failing source of delight to her.



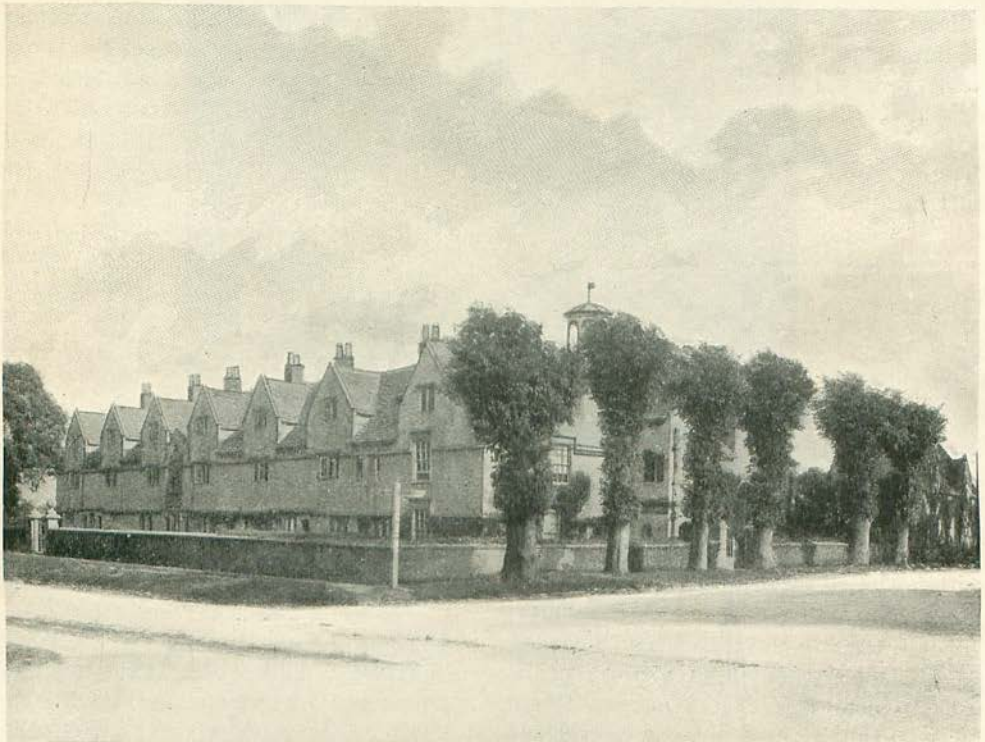
*From a photograph by John R. Singer, Chippenham.*

THE AVENUE, FROM THE LODGE GATES, CORSHAM COURT.



As you enter Corsham Court from the small hall or vestibule, the front staircase takes you by surprise. It is of noble proportions, and consists of a broad central flight of steps, with side stairways branching from it and terminating in a gallery with corridors on either side. It is on a similar plan to the famous staircase of Stafford House. The gallery and the numerous corridors are a perfect treasure-house of lovely and interesting antiques. The collection of china, which is displayed in cabinets round the corridors, is extremely rare and valuable. A set of old Chelsea is particularly beautiful. Fine trophies of the chase—antlers and skins—meet the eye at all points of the staircase, and now and again one comes upon a helmet or cuirass which might have served the lords of Corsham during the Crusades. Among the beautiful cabinets and antiques I noticed an old oak chest, with massive iron bands and formidable-looking lock, which carried one in imagination back to the days when great feudal barons reigned at Corsham Court.

For many generations the glory of Corsham has been its pictures. The original collection was one of the oldest private collections in the country, and it was augmented by seventy pictures from the gallery of Lord Methuen's maternal grandfather, the Rev. John Sanford, of Nynhead. The family portraits, by Reynolds and Gainsborough, cover the walls of the spacious dining-room; and the pictures by the old masters hang in a suite of state apartments built by Lancelot—or "Capability"—Brown. The walls of several of the rooms are hung with red silk damask, which is in a wonderful state of preservation, considering that the silk is one hundred and fifty years old. The chief room of the state apartments is the picture-gallery. Over the massive white marble chimneypiece is appropriately placed the bust of the Right Hon. Sir Paul Methuen, who lived in the reigns of King William, Queen Anne, and George I. He held a number of important State offices, being Ambassador to the Courts of Germany, Spain, Portugal, and Sardinia, and one of the Lords of the Admiralty and a Lord of



*From a photograph by John R. Singer, Chippenham.*



the Treasury. He it was who founded the Corsham collection; and many of the mirrors with exquisite carved wood frames richly gilt, the Spanish cabinets, embossed silk curtains, and other costly antiques were brought by him from Spain and Portugal. There is about the Court a fascinating blend of English antique and the splendours of the more sumptuous land of the Moors.

Lady Methuen's boudoir opens out of the red drawing-room of the state apartments, and, like it, has the walls entirely covered with old red silk damask. The mullioned windows of this room are exquisitely carved on the interior, and beautiful old gilt mirrors adorn the walls. I have refrained from attempting to give a list of the old masters in

the picture-gallery, but a favourite picture is "The Annunciation," by Fra Filippo Lippi,

which hangs in the red drawing-room. The colouring is remarkably fine; a unique effect is produced by a vista of the town of Nazareth and open country beyond seen from the apartment where the Virgin sits listening to the tidings brought by her angel visitor. In the background sits a monk—a device adopted by the painter for introducing his own portrait into the picture, which was against the canons of the Roman Catholic Church. This conception of the Annunciation is in marked contrast to the Greek tradition, which places the scene at the fountain of Nazareth, and still more to the impressionist picture which caused so much attention in the Paris Salon of 1898.



*From a photograph by Elliott & Fry.*

LIEUTENANT-GENERAL LORD METHUEN, C.B., C.M.G.

