The home of the College. 14 Princes Gate

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EACH house has its own personality. How much this is due to the presence of the occupants of the day and how much to the generations of families who may have lived in it in the past is difficult to say. Any general practitioner who has worked long enough in one area will bear witness to the individual atmosphere of the dwellings of his patients. Is it only in the chambers of his mind that the imprint of those present becomes so mixed with the shadows of those departed? This no statistical exercise can demonstrate; no controlled trial matching the new with the old is possible.

These thoughts arose from the consideration of the history of 14 Princes Gate. What follows is not a definitive history, more a peep into the past. We believe that the terraced houses of which our College occupies the two most easterly, were originally built by a speculative builder named Holland. Probably the first occupant of No. 13 was Junius Spencer Morgan (1813–1890) an international banker from America whose business—J. S. Morgan & Company—became one of the foremost issuing houses in London. Junius S. Morgan resided in London for many years managing his firm's European interests, and he had another large mansion—Dover House, in 70 acres of land, at Roehampton—where he entertained lavishly. Distinguished as was Junius S. Morgan, his son surpassed him. J. Pierpont Morgan entered his father's business in 1857, inherited from him £2,600,000 in 1890, and disposed of a fortune of $100,000,000 in his lifetime. Of his business successes there is no need to write; they made possible his massive collection of books, manuscripts and works of art. A great cosmopolitan, he had homes in many lands, but it was in London at Princes Gate, where he had acquired No. 14 and joined it with No. 13* into one stately home, that he lived for the greater part of his latter years. And it was at Princes Gate that he assembled a magnificent collection of paintings representative of all the great schools—these were works chosen by himself for his own enjoyment. We may gather a little about this former owner of our College from his biographers. He was a man who inspired absolute confidence. "In his word and his faith implicit faith was reposed. His very physique was commanding. He had a large frame with massive shoulders, a big head with piercing eyes, shaggy brows and a powerful nose. His eyes could be icy and his frown terrifying upon occasion. His manner at times was abrupt and dictatorial. He had a positive way of doing business; he dealt in ultimatums. . . . Under an exterior which frightened many there was a kindness, but his strong emotional nature harboured violent dislikes as well as likes." How then did this man "who dealt in ultimatums" furnish his London home? His home was not one to which he admitted other than his intimates, though surely at times his entertaining must have been lavish. There is only one record of its interior; fortunately a vivid description by an accurate observer. Bishop William Lawrence of Massachusetts was a friend of Pierpont Morgan and often visited him in Princes Gate. His record is printed in *Pierpont Morgan as collector and patron 1837–1913* and is reproduced here in full by kind permission of the director of the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York. Visitors to the College may like to attempt to follow the tour described, and to imagine where the various items were and which room was which.

"I doubt whether there has ever been a private dwelling house so filled with works of the

*Visitors to North America will have observed that no building has a 13th floor. Whether it was to comply with custom that No. 14 was bought and No. 13 thus eliminated is doubtful.

richest art. As one entered the front door, he was still in a conventional London house, until passing along three or four yards, his eye turned and looked through the door on the left into the dining-room—in size an ample city dining-room, but in glory of colour such as few other domestic dining-rooms ever enjoyed. The visitor was amazed and thrilled at the pictures: Sir Joshua Reynolds' masterpiece, *Madame Delmé and Children*, a great full-length portrait of a lady by Gainsborough, another [of *Mrs. Scott-Jackson*] by Romney. One's eye seemed to pierce the wall into the outer world through the landscapes of Constable [*The White Horse*] and Hobbema. Behind Mr Morgan's chair at the end of the table hung a lovely Hoppner of three children [*The Goodsall Children*], a beautiful boy standing in the centre, full of grace. Why did Mr Morgan have this picture behind him? If you would sit in his chair, which faced the front of the house with the two windows looking out upon the hedge and trees of Hyde Park, you would discover between these two windows a narrow mirror, which enabled Mr Morgan to have before him always the reflected portrait of the figure of the boy. As one passed through the hall, each picture was a gem. In the centre of the hall, where the dividing wall used to stand, was a graceful bronze figure, turning at will upon its base, once the weather vane of the Sainte Chapelle (*Ange de Lude* now in the Frick collection); near it a stone figure from the Duomo of Florence; cabinets standing about with reliquaries, statuettes and other figures.

Before going into the two rooms at the back, one passed upstairs to the next floor and entered a large drawing-room at the left. The beautiful *Elizabeth* [*Georgiana*], *Duchess of Devonshire*, by Gainsborough, looked down from the mantel. When I saw it for the first time, my memory slipped back [to Mr Morgan's story] of how he gained possession of the picture. It was, as everybody knows, stolen in 1876 immediately after it had been purchased by Messrs Agnew at the Wynn-Ellis sale at a large price. At the end of 25 years it was discovered in Chicago, and in April 1901, was given back to Messrs Agnew. Mr Morgan said that one day in 1901, after a short absence from New York, as he came home his butler said that a representative of the Messrs Agnew had called and that he had the *Duchess of Devonshire* with him. "Where is he?" asked Mr Morgan, "I want to see him." "He was just going to sail for home and is gone." Mr Morgan said, " I was determined to have that picture and I took the next ship for England. My ship was faster than his. He arrived in London on Saturday, I on Sunday. I sent word to one of the firm that I must see him on Monday morning before he went down town. He came to Prince's Gate, and I said, "You have the *Duchess of Devonshire.*" "Yes," he replied. "You remember that my father on the afternoon before that picture was stolen was about to buy it and was going to make his decision the next morning. He wanted it. What my father wanted, I want, and I must have the *Duchess.*" "Very good." said the dealer. "What is the price?" asked Mr Morgan. "That is for you to say, Mr Morgan." "No, whatever price your firm thinks is fair, I pay." And the *Duchess of Devonshire*. . . was hung in Prince's Gate.

"Turning from her, one's eye glanced about the room and recognized portraits made familiar through prints and engravings of a Rembrandt, a Frans Hals, a child by Velasquez, and the magnificent Van Dyck *Woman in Red and Child.* Two or three tables solid, with shallow drawers, stood in the room. As we opened one drawer after another, the wealth of beauty, colour and fineness of execution of hundreds of miniatures were disclosed. As we took up one miniature after another, small and large, we realized not only the beauty of the miniature but the wealth and appropriateness of the frame, for when a miniature has been purchased with an unworthy frame, an artist had designed a frame in harmony with the style of the date of the miniature and set it round with gold and often with rows of pearls and diamonds. Each miniature with its frame seemed to compose one beautiful cluster of jewels. Glancing at two glorious Turners, one at each side of the large door, we passed into the next room, a perfect example of Louis XVI, walls, rugs, furniture, and ornaments of the richest of that day. Across the hall to the front, we entered the Fragonard room, whose walls were drawn in by the builder to meet the exact dimensions and designs of the panels. (These are the Fragonards now in the Frick collection.) In the centre stood a table covered with a glass cabinet filled with beautiful jewelled boxes. A glimpse of the portrait of the most attractive boy that one has ever seen, probably by Velasquez, drew one into the Louis XV room, where there were beautiful cabinets and examples of Sèvres. Portraits of Queen Anne of Austria and her brother, Cardinal Ferdinand, by Rubens, looked down upon us.

"As one went down the staircase, a shelf at the landing was filled with a number of china pug dogs, such as ladies collected in their parlors some 30 years ago. Mr Morgan's devotion to his mother's memory retained these here, although from every other point of view they were out of harmony with the surroundings.

"As we stepped down the last two or three stairs, Van Dyck's *Duke of Warwick* facing us directly, seemed to be walking toward us. Going from the hall to the two rooms at the back, we entered on the right the parlor where guests were received. Here great and graceful Gainsboroughs and Raeburns gave warmth to the atmosphere, while the furniture given by Louis XV to the King of Denmark seemed always to have belonged here. When, a few months before, Queen Alexandra and her sister, the Empress of Russia, were being shown about the house, one of them exclaimed, "Why, there are the chairs!" and the other said, "So they are." Mr Morgan said, "What chairs?" "Why, our brother had those chairs but they disappeared and we never knew what had become of them; they must have been sold."

"The vital centre of the house was the adjoining room, Mr Morgan's own. Over the mantel hung the portrait of his father; his portrait hung also over the mantel in his library in New York. On the right of the chimney hung the portrait of Miss Croker in her beautiful youth by Lawrence, and on the mantel beside it stood a large photograph of herself at the age of 93 given by her to Mr Morgan. How many women would have the hardihood to encourage this contrast? One must say, however, that in the revelation of the growth of character, the contrast is in favour of the old lady. On the other side of the chimney hung Romney's portrait of Lady Hamilton reading the news of Nelson's victory, her eyes filled with glad surprise. Diagonally across from *Miss Croker* hung Sir Thomas Lawrence's full-length portrait of Miss Farren, Lady Derby. The walls were rich with other portraits and pictures, the tables and bookcases strewn with statuettes and works of art dating from 3000 B.C. up to the twentieth century, some of them left there by dealers for Mr Morgan to inspect, others selected by himself in Rome, Egypt and elsewhere.

"At a dinner party one evening, Mrs Talbot, the wife of the then Bishop of Southwark, said to me, "What a mass of interesting things are in this house!" I answered, "Mrs Talbot, the most interesting thing in this house is the host." For that reason, one thinks always of Mr Morgan's chair in the corner near the fireplace, with *Miss Croker* overhead, the sun pouring in from the window and the song of a bullfinch, the most beautiful bird voice I ever heard, making the air rich with melody. Beside Mr Morgan was always his card table, his pack of cards for solitaire at any moment and a box of great cigars nearby. Here he passed hours at a time, talking, thinking, dozing, and playing solitaire. Many smaller men make their room a keep from which all guests are excluded. Although his secretary passed the mornings in this room and dictation of telegrams might be going on, the doors were almost always open and we went in and out at will, sitting and talking,—indeed, that was the living-room downstairs for all the members of the party.

"It was this atmosphere of domesticity in the midst of the richest of treasures that made Princes Gate unique; everything in the house was a part of the house and the house was the home of its master. To be sure, beneath were two large rooms of steel, each of them furnished with glass cases which were illuminated by electric lights. In the one was table china, rich and precious; in the other, great pieces of old silver for the centre of the table. These were in the house not to be gazed upon by visitors but to be used every day.

"Domestic as the house was, it was at the same time open to hundreds of visitors who had requested the privilege of Mr Morgan and who presented his card. As one passed through the hall, he met two or three persons at a time, connoisseurs, artists, representatives of nobility from every country in Europe and from America, attended by the faithful Margaret, who, beginning as a young servant girl with his father, was the housekeeper, guide and factotum of Princes Gate. Henry, also a young servant of his father, was the butler who took up his story with the visitors when Margaret was overburdened."

An annotated catalogue of the pictures in the collection of J. Pierpont Morgan at Princes Gate and Dover House was published privately. Amongst this galaxy of paintings—the Gainsboroughs. the Lawrences, the Reynolds, the Romneys and the Turners, the Van Dycks, Frans Hals' four pictures, two Rembrandts, two Rubens, a Canaletto and a Raphael and many others, there was one small painting by W. C. Standfield of

Dartmouth Castle and harbour. Pierpont Morgan was a great yachtsman and he owned the Corsair in which he must often have sailed into Dartmouth, the safest and most beautiful harbourage on the south-west coast.

Imposition of death duties in England and the removal of import duties on articles over 100 years old in America, caused Pierpont Morgan in 1912 to remove his collections from 14 Princes Gate to America. When he died in 1913, J. P. Morgan Jr. inherited Princes Gate. When the war of 1914 came he loaned the house to the Council of War Relief for the Professional Classes who used it as a maternity home. The house was then unfurnished, and members of the council loaned or gave furniture, bed linen, blankets and coverlets for the use of the hospital. A rota of doctors, men and women, worked in the hospital with conspicuous success and no maternal death was recorded during the four years it operated. There was only one infant death. Later the house passed to the American nation and was the residence of the ambassadors of that nation until World War II. It was to this house the future president John F. Kennedy, a serving officer in the American forces, would repair on leave. Some will recall the great sadness which fell on the assembled guests for the annual council dinner of our college in 1963 when news came of the president's assassination.

Except for a short interval when it was the temporary headquarters of Independent Television, Princes Gate has always been a home. When the College acquired it, it was a planning condition of the local authority that it should not be used entirely as offices but that the major part of it should be used as residential accommodation. With the limited means at its disposal, the College set about furnishing it in character with the dignity of its past, and the dignity which it was expected to maintain in future years. Great thought was put into the furnishing of the building and in the hands of Brigadier Glyn (Hughie) Hughes and his wife, with the limited means placed at their disposal, they produced a magnificent effect. But more is needed, and the Council are gradually collecting furnishings and household effects of a suitable nature. Many faculties and individuals have contributed handsomely. Even wine is being laid down though it is too much to expect that it will measure up with the great bins which were maintained by the late Mr Morgan.

We hope that 14 Princes Gate will remain for many years the nerve centre of the College though it is already stretching at the seams. When the foundation council planned the future of the College they accepted at once that many of the activities of the College could equally well be served at places far removed from the centre, and agreed that the College was not to be 'a building in London', although a headquarters there had to be found.

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