The first home of A. W. N. Pugin by John Piper

He first of the two houses that Pugin built for himself stands a couple of miles out of Salisbury on the road to Southampton. In 1865 he bought half an acre of ground between the Avon and this main road; a beautiful site on a southward-sloping bank, looking across water-meadows with willows and alders to the dark trees of Longford Park and to the rising chalk uplands with their crowing clumps on the Hampshire border.

The famous remark that Pugin made before his death about having "cramped a hundred years work into forty" indicates his character as a man as well as suggesting that kind of a prophet he was: a prophet of ideas that were before those of his time and not—at any rate, not as a matter of course—a prophet of vision who saw where such ideas would lead. And this house was a house of ideas rather than of vivid imagination. It stands here, unnoticed by passers-by, as it is unnoticed in any of the guide books to Salisbury or Wiltsshire. By 1883, when he built it, Pugin had already lived one life which on the whole had been a failure, and had, at twenty-three, begun another. He had married and had a child, which his wife had died bearing, leaving him miserable; he had been an unsuccessful business man and—in symbol and in fact—a shipwrecked mariner. And now, married again and lately converted to Roman Catholicism, he felt settled and mature and ready to devote himself with the "earnest zeal of a convert" to proving by works that "everything grand, offspring, and noble in art is the result of feelings produced by the Catholic religion on the human mind," ready to try and mitigate the disastrous effects of the "present decay of taste," a prime result of which—so he saw it,—stared him in the face whenever he went into Salisbury, where Wyat had lately been so hard at work.

He had already unsuccessfully tried to persuade his father to guarantee, or consent to his buying, a piece of ground for a house "built on mediæval principles" at Christchurch in Hampshire, for which place he had conceived a passion on account of its priory, its ruined serfs' houses and its river, all of which he had included in a sketch done when he was thirteenth, which Ferrey reproduces. "There are only two things worth living for: Christian architecture and a boat." Christchurch provided both. And it was there that he insisted on burying his young wife, though she had never lived there and had died in London. For St. Marie's Grange he chose a site beside the same Avon. Ferrey gives a wood-engraving of St. Marie's Grange which bears but little resemblance to the house as it was built. "The structure," he says, "was principally of brick," and so it is. But his engraving shows a stone-built house with an outside staircase and other features which have, and had, no being in reality. Possibly it is founded on sketches that Pugin had done for his Christchurch proposals. Ferrey also says of the house: "It was quaint and odd, and much noticed by people of the neighbourhood who took an interest in such matters. It could scarcely be said that he was successful in this work; there was nothing very inviting in the exterior design, and a great absence of modern comfort in the interior arrangement. The building tended rather to show the eccentricity of its owner than his superior skill in design; still it was not without merit." It adds later that the house cost "upwards of £2,000 on the building alone" and that when Pugin left it in 1841 it was sold to Mr. Staple, from whom he originally bought the ground, for £200.

To us to-day, as to the neighbours then, the house at first sight seems what is

1 Biographies of J. Wylly Pugin and his father. Benjamin Ferrey. (1883) p. 50.
2 Ibid. p. 75.