

Just. 10/11/19
20 Sept. 1919

MOUNT MERRION.

ITS EIGHTEENTH CENTURY CHARMS.

AN ENGLISH ENTHUSIAST.

(BY F. ELRINGTON BALL.)

The beauty of Mount Merrion is well known. Nature and art have combined to make the demesne the glory of Dublin County, and have left it unrivalled in its situation and in its design. When laid out in the reign of Queen Anne, the demesne was intended to surround a great mansion, which was to stand at the head of the elm-bordered avenue leading from Stillorgan road. Of the mansion only the wings were built. The northern wing contains the stables, the southern wing is incorporated in the present house.

During the eighteenth century Mount Merrion attracted besides its owners, the Viscounts Fitzwilliam, many temporary occupants of note. the good Archbishop King, the great Chancellor Jocelyn, the masterful Earl of Clare sought in turn there relaxation from the cares of State. But none of them surpasses in charm John Wainwright, a friend of Swift and of Berkeley, who wandered over the broad acres of the demesne in the reign of George the Second. An alumnus of Westminster School and of Christ Church, Oxford, he was called to the English Bar about the time of the Hanoverian succession, and became secretary to the Prince of Wales. When Berkeley went to Bermuda he had some idea of throwing in his lot with him, but was persuaded by the celebrated Mrs. Clayton, afterwards Viscountess Sundon, to accept the more prosaic rôle of a Baron of the Exchequer in Ireland. Here he remained until in 1741 his life was cut short by jail-fever, contracted while serving as judge of assize in Munster. Amongst a large number of letters from him two relate to Mount Merrion, and may give pleasure to others besides those for whom Wainwright's academic and social qualities have interest. The first letter is addressed to Mrs. Clayton; the second to the Duke of Newcastle, the future Prime Minister, who had been his school-fellow, and was then a Secretary of State. It is curious to observe how conspicuous Stillorgan obelisk, the creation of the architect of the Houses of Parliament, was then, and to find objects in Ireland compared with Tothill street in Westminster and Claremont, then one of the Duke of Newcastle's residences. In the conclusion of the second letter allusion is made to the Lord Lieutenant, the first Duke of Dorset.