COTEHELE HOUSE,

CORNWALL.

MANY as are the venerable houses in whose weathered walls and panelled chambers we find, as it were, the living presence of our long-dead fathers, there is, perhaps, not one which is so worthy of attention as the grey old dwelling-place of Cotehele. Few river courses in England are so rich in landscape charm as are those sylvan reaches of the Tamar which are the delight of its neighbourhood. Some places may be more architecturally perfect, like Haddon; a few may be more finished in detail, as Oxburgh or the great tower of Layer



GATE OF GRANITE.



NORTH-WEST CORNER OF COURT.



THE HALL.



THE WAY OUT.



HALL ENTRANCE.



OLD DRAWING ROOM.



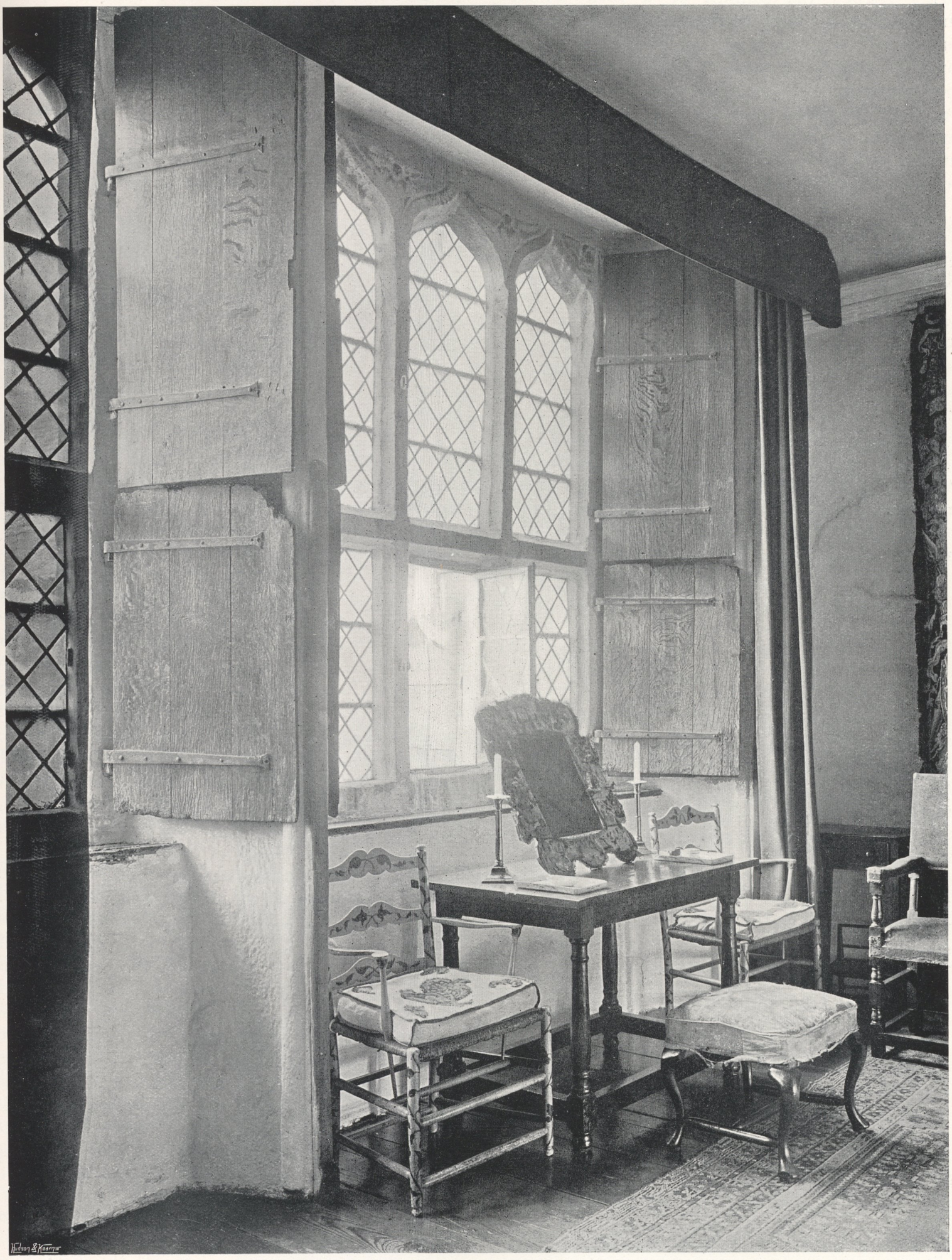
"PUNCH-ROOM."

Marney ; many may be more finished in form, like Blickling or Montacute ; but we do not know another so little touched by any hand save that of Time as Cotehele. The house stands practically as it stood when fresh from the hand of its builder ; there have since been added tapestry and some later features, but there is surprisingly little about the house belonging to any later century than the seventeenth, and thus the spell of antiquity is unbroken. The atmosphere is mediæval, and it seems as if we could still hear the clang of the mailed heel, the challenge of the warder from the tower, the laughter of the retainers who lingered in the hall when the lord and his lady had withdrawn. The individuality of the place is another point of infinite charm. It is like nothing else we know of. It has something in common, perhaps, with the Border peels which were to overawe the marauding Scots, for it was built in a turbulent region, strong as a place of defence in a land wherein civil brawl broke out not seldom into open strife.

Here, on this wooded eminence above the Tamar, in the Cornish parish of Calstock, was seated anciently a family of Cotehele, which took its name from the place, and remained in possession until the time of Edward III. It will be observed that the structure of Cotehele House displays in its masonry the character of at least two different dates, and we may attribute the rougher rubble-work of the lower walls to the time of the Coteheles. The heiress of the house, towards the end of the fourteenth century, was Hillaria de Cotehele, a lady of moderate estate, about whose wardship and marriage arose a notable dispute. Edward the Black Prince, as Duke of Cornwall, said that these rights were his, and that he had sold them for the sum of 40s. to one John de Brendon, "so that she be married without disparagement." The money was to be paid to the feodary of the Duchy, and this official was charged to deliver to John de Brendon "the body of the said heiress to be married as aforesaid," on payment duly made. It is an old saying that "Love laughs loud at locksmiths," and so he laughed at John de Brendon, who thus sought, by a commercial transaction and by the favour of the Black Prince, to purchase the heiress of Cotehele. In those days not only did the lord have custody of the minor and his or her lands, without accounting for the profits of the estate, but also the right of disposing of the ward in suitable marriage ; but if the ward refused the marriage the value — in this case 40s.—would be forfeited. Disputes arose as to the due ownership of these singular rights in the fate of the lady ; but Hillaria herself, claiming to be of the full legal age of fourteen and upwards, prayed to have enquiry made as to her age, so that she might have the benefit of the statute which would free her from control in the matter of her marriage. As to her lands, she had to "sue out of the livery" of the lord by the process of *ouster le main*. It should have been easy to prove that she was sixteen or more ; and it seems likely that she had already placed her affections, for she shortly afterwards married William Edgcumbe. This gentleman belonged to an ancient family which had been seated at the small house of Edgcumbe in the parish of Milton Abbot from time immemorial, and was the second son of Richard Edgcumbe of that place.

We pass on to the builder of Cotehele House, as it now stands. Sir Richard Edgcumbe was the grandson of William and Hillaria, and he rose to be a man of very great importance in the West Country in the time of Richard III. and his successor, holding many offices of trust, and was Escheator of Cornwall. It would appear that political strife in his case led to personal enmity, for he was long in bitter antagonism to his neighbour, Robert Willoughby of Bere Ferrers. The latter gentleman, who subsequently became Lord Willoughby de Broke, seemed at one time to have meditated the death of Richard Edgcumbe. At least, the latter made grave allegations against him, which are still upon record. Once, as he was riding home to Cotehele from the house of a friend, Willoughby, with thirty-four armed men, lay in wait to murder him, and "upon him made a saute," whereupon he was put to flight and chased as far as Liskeard. On another occasion these enemies discharged arrows at his servants, and threatened them that they would burn the place unless they disclosed the whereabouts of their master. That same night Edgcumbe was again attacked by Willoughby, who had with him twenty-four sturdy men, and once more he was constrained to fly. Later on, his enemies lay in wait for him and haunted the woods and hedges at Cotehele, so that he durst not approach his house nor "at that same place abyde." They stole his household goods, including bedding, blankets and a hunting horn ; and once, when he was at sea, intending to land at Fowey, they prevented him from doing so, and he was obliged to keep away from the coast for many days.

We thus see that, in its very beginning, as the Edgcumbes knew it, Cotehele was a place that required to be strong. The enmity, however, passed away, and subsequently Lord de Broke and Sir Richard Edgcumbe held high places together at the Court of Henry VII. ; and it is curious to note that 300 years later the estates of Willoughby, having passed into the possession of Lord Buckinghamshire, came to Richard, second Earl of Mount Edgcumbe, on his marriage with Lady Sophia Hobart. There appears to be no doubt that Sir Richard Edgcumbe had joined the adversaries of Richard III., and had taken part with Buckingham in his endeavours. The Duke was captured and beheaded at Salisbury in 1483, and some of his followers paid the same penalty ; but Edgcumbe escaped and fled to Cotehele, pursued, it is said, by a band



PART OF THE SOUTH ROOM.

of armed men under Sir Henry Trenowth of Bodrugan. A curious legend is told of this episode. Edgcumbe escaped from the mansion house into the wood, closely followed, and, having gained the summit of a rock which emerges from the deep thickets above the Tamar, his cap fell into the water as he was climbing down to conceal himself. The soldiers thereupon arriving, and seeing his cap floating down the river, imagined that he had perished, and gave up the pursuit. He afterwards passed into France, and after the fall of the King erected a chapel, which still remains, in grateful memory of his escape. He was created a Knight Banneret on the field of Bosworth by Henry VII., held high offices, and was greatly enriched in lands and possessions, receiving among other territories the estates of Bodrugan, which had belonged to his pursuer, and the story is told that Bodrugan was hunted by Edgcumbe, as Edgcumbe had been by Bodrugan, and that he escaped in a like fashion at Bodrugan's Leap near Dodman Head. Edgcumbe thus became rich and powerful, but only survived his accession of fortune a few years. It may be convenient here, before describing Cotehele House, to say that Sir Richard Edgcumbe's son, Piers Edgcumbe, was also a supporter of Henry VII., and was made a Knight of the Bath at the creation of the Prince of Arthur. His son was the builder of Mount Edgcumbe House, but members of the family lived at Cotehele from time to time afterwards, notably Colonel Piers Edgcumbe, who suffered heavy losses by sequestration as a supporter of Charles I.

The principal part of this untouched example of an embattled mediæval mansion was built in the last years of the fifteenth century, but evidences of the earlier structure will be seen in the walls, where rubble-work and ashlar masonry of rugged granite are curiously intermixed. On the south front is the entrance gateway under a strong tower, with the singular arched entrance under a heavy drip-stone. The door is of oak, heavily studded with nails, and the archway within is groined with ribbed granite. Two windows in the rubble masonry are of a simple type, and one of them on the upper floor does not communicate with the room upon that floor, but gives light through a chimney-like shaft to a dungeon or place of concealment on the ground level. There are two arched doorways on the right upon entering, which admit to the porter's lodge and to the upper floor. We thus pass into the courtyard, which is admirably illustrated, and the varying character of the building will be particularly noticed. Opposite is a four-centred arch leading into the retainers' court, and the hall is seen with the east end of the chapel, which appears in the north-west angle. Upon the east side of the house some few alterations have been made, but they are in excellent harmony with the rest of the structure and do nothing to spoil the charm. The interior of the great hall is particularly impressive, with its lofty open timber roof, its rugged walls, its ancient tapestry, its suits of armour and its antique character. The interior fittings are retained, and the massive tables and other furniture of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries invest the place with a singularly antique character. Upon the wall hang many trophies of the chase—horns, antlers and horns of the Irish elk—with two ancient cast bronze horns which deserve notice, one of them being a speaking trumpet, and it is surmised that these may have been brought from Ireland by Sir Richard Edgcumbe, who was sent thither by Henry VII. as ambassador to certain Irish leaders.

The other apartments are all extremely interesting, and each of them is stored with old furniture and many curious relics of bygone days. All are hung with tapestry, sometimes lifted to give entrance, and the hearths are supplied with logs, supported upon ancient fire-dogs. The dining-room at the end of the hall joins the chapel, and the old withdrawing-room has its walls curiously painted, and its singular tapestry depicts the death of Eurydice. There is also a very remarkable ante-room, or "punch-room," hung with ancient tapestry, and hence a staircase leads up through an archway. The stained east window of the chapel represents the Crucifixion, with angels, and has been carefully restored; and there is also in the chapel a copy of the funeral memorial of Sir Richard Edgcumbe at Morlaix, as Comptroller of the Household of Anne Duchess of Brittany.

The bedrooms upstairs have furniture of the time of Elizabeth, of James and of Charles. The charm of the interior largely consists in its being practically unaltered in its furnishing and decoration since the end of the seventeenth century; there is much that is older, but next to nothing newer, and all seems to belong to the house and its history. Even a splendid suite of Sheraton chairs, settees and card tables seem in this ancient environment almost too modern. It belongs to the age of oak, it countenances the age of walnut; but the age of mahogany is a bit of an upstart, and anything more recent than that is unknowable to this bluest of blue blood houses.