BLICKLING HALL, NORFOLK.

NORFOLK has many great houses of fine old red brick, and Blickling Hall is the most stately of these. Once it was a rich county, with its companies of weavers at work in the towns where churches and inns still crowd together after a fashion which tells of prosperous days, and with its famous ports of Lynn and Yarmouth. Trade came to the county from its neighbours over-sea, dwellers in those Low Countries which first learned the secret of making a great house a place of comfort as well as of high state. So Norfolk, in its fat years, set itself to imitate the Fleming in his love for sumptuous furnishing and gallant houses, and Blickling still stands as a seventeenth century example of a Norfolk man's country palace.

After the conquest of England, the manor of Blickling, which had been Harold's manor, became a part of the lands of the See of Norwich, and the bishops had a house and park here. But in the days when politic churchmen gave away their coat in order that they might keep their shirt the bishops' manor in Blickling came to the hands of King Henry VIII, by whom it was granted to Sir John Clere, who joined it to the other manor in Blickling, called Dagworths Manor.

Sir Thomas Dagworth, a knight out of Suffolk, being lieutenant for King Edward III. in Brittany, took the King's enemy, Charles of Blois, prisoner, with much slaughter of knights and men-at-arms, and having smitten thus handsomely with the sword, perished by the sword in the same year, being cut off in an ambush. By his marriage he was a near kinsman of the King, and his son, Sir Nicholas Dagworth, had high employment from Edward III. and the second Richard. He commanded for the King in Aquitaine, and went on embassies to treat with the dukes and lords of Italy, with the princes of Germany, and with popes and kings. This Sir Nicholas had the manor, thenceforward called by his name as Dagworths Manor, under a settlement of 1368. Here he built a new



FROM THE PORCH.



NORTH-EAST AND SOUTH-EAST FRONTS.



THE PORCH AND THE BRIDGE.

house, and here he died at the beginning of a new century. He is more than a name in Blickling, for in the church one may still see his figure in brass on his tombstone—a long and lean face, with a moustached lip showing below his pointed bascinet, his body clad in close-fitting harness and tight surcoat. His sword and heavy dagger balance each other against his thighs, his feet rest on a couching lion, and his head upon a great helm with a crest of a griffon's head.

After him the Dagworth Manor came to the hands of yet more famous soldiers. Old Sir Thomas Erpingham, the hero of Agincourt, was lord here, and sold to Sir John Fastolf, that rich old fox of Norfolk, who added this manor to the broad lands which the spoil of the



THE CLOCK TURRET AND ENTRANCE.



THE STAIRCASE.

foreign wars had brought him. Sir John was a man of affairs as well as a man of the sword, and he did not keep Dagworths Manor long in his hands, but allowed one Geoffrey Boleyn, who lived under his patronage, to buy it of him at a price. Master Boleyn, sometime Lord Mayor of London, should have been at least as keen at a bargain as the soldier his patron, but a letter written by him after Sir John's death complains sadly to John Paston, the knight's executor, of the price paid when the writer bought the manor of Blickling "of my maister Fastolf, hoose sowle God asoyle."

This Geoffrey Boleyn, a Norfolk man by birth, must have found that even in London Sir John Fastolf's name was a weighty one, for as a citizen and mercer he made his way, being alderman of his ward and Lord Mayor in 1457.



THE STAIRCASE—ASCENT TO GALLERY.



THE STAIRCASE—CENTRAL VIEW.

His wife, Anne, was one of the daughters and heirs of the Lord Hoo and Hastings, and glass in the chapel of Blickling church asked for prayers for the good estate of Geoffrey Boleyn and Anne his consort, who made the chapel and its window. His two sons, having rank and place from their mother and riches from their father, were both knights. The younger of these survived his brother, and was made Knight of the Bath when Richard III. was crowned. He took to wife a daughter and co-heir of Thomas, Earl of Ormond, and was also possessed of Hever Castle in Kent, already described in this volume. With that place rather than with Blickling is the short greatness and sudden ruin of the Boleyn family connected. When Geoffrey Boleyn's grandson, after becoming Earl of Wiltshire and marrying his daughter to the King, saw that daughter's head and his son's also fall by the axe, he felt the joy of life go from him and two years later he died. His niece carried Blickling to the Cleres, who eventually sold it to Sir Henry Hobart.

We have now come to the family that built the Blickling of our pictures. The lands had passed to those who knew them well, Hobarts out of Suffolk and Norfolk, sprung from James Hobart, Henry VII.'s attorney-general, and friend of the John Paston to whom Geoffrey Boleyn had written bewailing his costly purchase of Blickling. Sir Henry, the new purchaser of the manor, was a baronet of a creation of 1611, the year in which baronetcies began. He was Chief Justice of the Common Pleas, and must have been popular in his county, where even now a chief justice who held that foreign corn should be taxed until home prices went up would be hailed by his farmer neighbours as a very Daniel for nice judgment of the affairs of the ploughlands. He seems to have been a learned and modest man, not too subservient to court influence at a time when all men were subservient, although Bacon, whose road to the attorney-generalship he had blocked for seven years, accuses him as one who "falsely affected intimacy with great folk," an old English vice which has not yet had its day. He died in the first year of King Charles at Blickling, which he had possessed since 1616.

The chief justice's son is usually called the builder of Blickling Hall, but it is evident that the father was not long content with the old house which had sheltered the Cleres and the Boleyns. His arms are over the entrance with those of his wife, and dates about the building show that the principal work was finished in his time under the care of Robert Timmins, the architect, who is buried in Blickling churchyard hard by his masterpiece.

His younger son, Miles Hobart, is generally confused with his fiery cousin, Sir Miles Hobart, who locked the door of the House of Commons and pocketed the key, in order that timid members should stay to face a debate on tunnage and poundage, and, incidentally, on the Royal prerogatives, for which Sir Miles was long caged in the Tower, refusing to give sureties for future good behaviour. He yielded at last to the plague which was creeping about his prison gates, gave his sureties, and died the next year by the oversetting of his coach.

Sir John Hobart, the third baronet, was a little child when this obstinate kinsman was wrangling for liberty and Parliamentary privileges, but he grew up another stout Parliamentarian Hobart, and was Lord Hobart in Oliver's House of Lords. Like many another who had been in the Commonwealth councils, he found it easy to make his peace when the King came home again, and in his time Blickling received King Charles II. through its stately gatehouse, to the joy of the neighbourhood, a country poet boasting that now

> Blickling two monarchs and two queens has seen,
> One king fetched thence, another brought, a queen.

Sir John had married into "the good old cause," for his wife was one of the daughters of John Hampden the patriot. Long afterwards, in 1824, their descendants inherited Hampden lands through marriage, and the Hobarts became Hobart-Hampdens.

King Charles had made a knight of Sir John's eldest boy on his coming to Blickling, but he failed to make a loyal courtier of the son and heir of a Cromwellian lord, and the grandson of the Hampden who had his death-wound at Chalgrove fight. Sir Henry Hobart of Blickling remembered of what blood he came when King James II. and his Parliament were at the old quarrel, and was among those members who passed the resolution in the Convention Parliament that the throne of England was vacant. As a gentleman of the horse he rode beside King William at Boyne Water, but he took no harm from the Irish bullets, dying at last of a contested election, for, at the polling in 1698, he challenged his neighbour Oliver Le Neve on account of certain injurious words which Le Neve disowned. The two met on Cawston Heath, where Le Neve took his adversary's sword-point in his arm, and stabbed with his own deep into Sir Henry's body. The baronet of Blickling died the next day, Le Neve flying the country to skulk abroad under false names.

The dead baronet's little boy grew up to hold a peerage as Lord Hobart of Blickling in 1728, and the earldom of Buckinghamshire in the Culloden year. These honours show that the head of the Blickling house was at least loyal to the new dynasty, but there can be small doubt that the earl owned his coronet to his sister Henrietta, the "Mrs. Howard," afterwards Countess of Suffolk, who was a recognised mistress of King George II. Surely the strangest of royal *liaisons*, this of the prim and strait-laced mistress whom her prince flouted and deserted for the sake of his better-loved wife.

In 1850 Blickling passed to the eighth Marquess of Lothian, whose widow, Constance, Lady Lothian, made it her home for the thirty years of her widowhood, doing much for the



THE LONG GALLERY.

improvement of the estate and place, the gardens having been planned and laid out by her in 1872. The walls of Blickling are nigh upon the three hundredth anniversary of their

building, and like the noble old house it is, the Hall seems to have taken colour and life from each of the generations that have lived and died in it. It is a splendid example of that Jacobean style, the broad-windowed style, which speaks of a land at peace. The walls warm with red brick enriched with stone-mullioned windows, stone mouldings and pinnacled gables remind us at once of both

Holland House and Quenby. Only in the dusk of the evening when no more than its square corner-towers stand up against the sky, flanking walls in shadow, could it suggest the old fortress-house from which it has developed.

The moat is there, but only as it were for old custom's sake in a county where there were many moated houses, for the hall is not entered over a drawbridge, but over a wide path of flag-stones along a stone bridge of two arches. At the bridge entry of the south front we look up at two stone bulls, admirable grotesques, grinning strangely as they sit each upon a square pedestal, supporting with loyal care scrolled scutcheons, the one with a bull's head crest of Hobart, the other with the falcon crest of the Bells from whom came the chief justice's wife. Above the pillars and rich spandrels of the doorway are the shield, helm and crest of Sir Henry Hobart flanked by two lesser bulls. These beasts



PART OF THE DRAWING-ROOM.



NORTH SIDE OF DINING-ROOM.

recall at first the bulls' heads of the Boleyns, or Bullens, the yet older lords of Blickling, but here they stand only for Hobarts, and the front which they guard was built in 1620.

The building is an H closed at either end, having inner and outer courts, the chief rooms lying on the eastern side. The hall, entered from the outer court, is of a character new-fashoned in the builder's day, being no longer the principal dwelling room, but merely an entry, and a case for a magnificent oaken staircase. It is comparable to that at Temple Newsam, but more closely resembles that at Hatfield both in the character and ornamentation of its newel-posts, and in the arcading of its balusters, and may well have been a free adaptation of it. But the Hatfield and Temple Newsam stairs, though ample and beautiful, follow the old plan of a single way clinging to the sides of its own circumscribed hall, whereas Blickling is an early—perhaps the earliest—example of a fully detached first flight dividing into a double way. The figures that surmount the newels are of fine quality and are scarcely equalled, except at Aldermaston. They are not, however, all original, for halfway up the stair we are saluted by a little soldier, who presents arms, in the cocked hat and looped skirts of the reign of King George III., and at the stairhead stands a highlander in a belted plaid, these being memorials of the alterations made by the second Earl of Buckinghamshire, who retired to his old Norfolk house after leaving Dublin, and spent his last years in planning repairs and changes in Blickling Hall, which suffered in his time by a fire on its western side. His portrait by Gainsborough is here in a room hung with tapestry, given to the ambassador by the Empress Catherine. The dining-room, seen in another of our pictures, is a grave place of panelled walls, having the date of 1627 over its mantel-piece, at which time old Sir Henry Hobart was dead and his son enriching the rooms of the completed house. Nevertheless, the son's piety has decorated the panels of the chimney-breast with a great achievement of his dead father's arms and with another of the family of his mother, Dorothy Bell of Beaupré. The drawing-room and the gallery, now used as a library, have plaster-work ceilings of the rarest, deep relief of strap and scrollwork, figures, curious proverbs (some unknown even to Sir William Stirling Maxwell), devices and flowers, and our drawing-room picture shows another most stately chimney-piece.

These pictures will make it clear that Blickling is no deserted palace. While its neighbour and rival of Oxnead decayed, Blickling flourished. It stands among pleasant gardens ringed in with the timber and water of a fair

park, and within doors is handsomely maintained. The printed books and manuscripts of a famous library are upon its shelves, and its many family portraits look down on rooms full of ancient furniture from the Jacobean age to the age of the industrious Chippendale. Blickling, indeed, lacks for nothing which an ancient country house should enjoy, not even for a ghost, for the late Mr. Augustus Hare used to repeat a tale of a fish from the lake in the park, out of whose jaws sprang a black dog-fiend, who ran his terrifying course in the passages of the Hall until confused by the breaking up of the old rooms with new partitions.



THE FORECOURT.