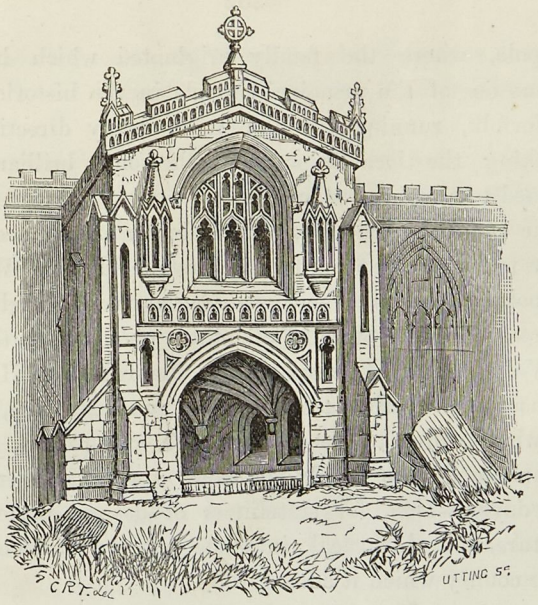


PORCH, WALPOLE ST. PETER'S.

Houghton-in-the-Brake.

BY

MRS. HERBERT JONES.

AMONG those level tracts of verdure, intersected by the gleaming of the narrow paths of water, so well known to all dwellers in the marsh district of Norfolk,—where the graceful vertical lines of the numerous steeples break the flatness, and rise into the air with welcome contrast,—there stands a church, remarkable for size and beauty even among the many adjacent edifices whose architectural merits are so unusual, and interesting as the centre of the village of

Walpole, where the family originated which has since become one of the principal threads in the historical tissue of Norfolk, running through it in many directions, and enriching the local tapestry with some brilliant spots, destined to remain permanent.

The events in the story of this family are connected with many parts of the county: Syderstone, Lynn, Wolterton, Walpole, are all filled with its traces, or identified with its progress; but the place of all others upon which the name of Walpole is most emphatically impressed is Houghton, the possession of the race for seven hundred years, and the site where, after the successive rise, occupation, and disappearance of two family mansions, a third was erected in later days, which, for stateliness of design, perfection of structure, and historical interest, takes a foremost place in the county which it adorns.

To settle at Houghton, the Walpoles, some time in the twelfth or early in the thirteenth century, left their abode in the centre of that vast level, which, bordered by the sea on the north and east, extends, beyond the limits of "Marshland" properly so called, far up into Lincolnshire, and southwards to where the grand gray outlines of Ely fill the sky. That cathedral, striking in itself, as it stands like a queen on its rocky islet,—the spot which for so many centuries gathered the riches of the surrounding flats, and studded them in return with architectural beauty,—is rendered still more impressive by the uninterrupted luminous arch behind it, shining down to the horizon, and by the masses of light, intercepted by neither incident nor shadow, which enliven the low-lying landscape in the foreground. This breadth of the sheet of sunshine, or of the darker veil of storm or twilight,—an effect unknown in more diversified regions,—is a feature which lends a charm to the fens, and seems to render them a fitting transition-ground between the homelike, cheerful, undulating country on the one side,

and the sea beyond them, where the cloud-shadows float with scarcely more distinctness and beauty than on their level sweep.

In the early days in question, before modern achievement had converted this amphibious district into a green and bounteous plain, the "vast and deep fen" must have offered little attraction either in the way of climate or society, although redeemed by the beauty of the churches which embellished the "seven towns of Marshland" and other spots. These, whose building was facilitated by the easy transmission of materials by water, were also due to the connection of most of the locality with the conventual establishment of Ely, which had possessed lands in Norfolk from a remote period, and held property during several centuries in Wisbech, Downham, Upwell, Emneth, Outwell, Wiggenhall, Lynn, Terrington, &c.[1]

Walpole St. Peter's had belonged to the church of Ely long before the Conquest,[2] and is described as "a place of no small note, by reason it gave birth to S. Goderic the Hermit, of whom Matthew Paris maketh ample mention." In spite however of this saintly association, the perpetual inundations in the two or three centuries following the days of Edward the Confessor, were so disheartening, that it is little to be wondered at if the Walpoles should have desired to leave quarters so precarious. Some resistance to the encroachments of the sea had been made as early as the times of the Romans, but long after draining had been begun, and banks made, accidents of an uncomfortable nature would occasionally occur. Life, we know, is proverbially insecure and uncertain, but this truth must have been presented with disagreeable emphasis to those who

[1] Dugdale's *Monasticon*, vol. i., part ii., p. 494.

[2] Bentham's *History of Ely*, p. 87. Walpole was given to Ely with Ailwin, who became a monk there, in the reign of King Ethelred. Ethelred died in 1016.

were liable to have the ground they stood on disappear beneath their feet, and the churches in which they were fostering their heavenly aspirations suddenly and mysteriously sink away into a nether region. Such an event is said to have happened more than once at the beginning of the fourteenth century, when "the church of Ristofte with three hundred acres of land, was lost for ever, on the Eve of St. Andrew, by the breaking of a certain sea bank,"[3] and another parish church with its parsonage was entirely ruined and sunk by the rushing in of the sea.

> "Where once was solid land, seas have I seen,
> And solid land where once deep seas have been."

The immediate occasion of the removal of the Walpoles from their habitation in Marshland, where they still for many centuries continued to hold a manor, was a marriage which took place between Emma, daughter of Walter de Havelton, or Houton, and Richard, the son of Reginald de Walpole. From this Richard de Walpole the possessors of Houghton descended in direct line from father to son until the year 1791, when that line was broken, and, six years later, was transferred by marriage to a different name. That the family had its residence at Walpole appears from certain ancient charters which are mentioned by Collins in his *Baronage* as being in the possession of Sir Robert Walpole (1727),[4] and also from the moat which remains in the village of Walpole, indicating the site of the house. There are also at Houghton some deeds which have reference to this marriage. Reginald de Walpole lived about the time of Henry I., but Collins considers that the Walpoles did not actually settle at Houghton until the time of Henry III., or early in the thirteenth century.

Houghton, which has been their dwelling-place for so many generations, must at first have almost equalled the

[3] Dugdale's *History of Embanking*, p. 255.

[4] Collins's *Baronage*, p. 652.

land they had left, in its barrenness and flatness, its absence of light and shadow, wood and shelter. The vast plantations, which now clothe, and beguile into some variety of line, its long straight reaches, were placed there hundreds of years later by Sir Robert Walpole, whilst the ancient ruined elms that still remain near the church, adorned the domain when the house existed of which traces are to be found close to the present building, but which sheltered Walpoles of far more modern aspect than the bridegroom who first took up his abode in this locality.

The Walpoles of the next few generations inhabited, as far as can be surmised from certain vestiges, a house north-west of the present one, which was situated in what is now laid out as part of the garden. The tall beeches which now grow there,—with glimpses framed between their stems of the broad velvet lawns, the noble grey domes and stately statues of the present abode,—the winding walks, and the luxuriant flowers, efface and supersede completely the scene where so much life and movement must once have been stirring. An avenue of very old oaks, not of particularly large size, but rugged with age, the trees about fourteen feet apart,—its narrowness, and the ancient look of the trees, which during the lapse of many years have remained unaltered in size, presenting a marked contrast to the spacious avenues which characterize the time of Sir Robert Walpole,—leads up to one side of this house, the earliest of which there are any remains. Near the termination of the avenue, but not actually in line with it,—suggesting the possibility either of a turn in the trees, or of those now remaining having formed a side aisle to another approach,—are the foundations, laid bare some years ago, of two very thick walls, one forming the side, the other probably the back main wall of the house.[5] They are four feet and a

[5] The uncovering of these foundations is testified to by the Rev. J. H. Broome, Vicar of Houghton. Mr. Broome has, with great kindness,

half thick; the latter one, which runs from north to south, 142 ft. long. The house, which faced either north or east, must have been a large one, and probably a fortified one, if the evidence is to be accepted of a stone mullioned window, furnished with very strong iron stanchions, which was dug up not long ago on this spot. Other objects have also been found here; part of a very old sun-dial, of simple design, a curious relic of the round of daily life which it suggests, of those with whom time is no longer, and a contrast to the elaborate bronze sun-dials, engraved with his coat of arms, and star and garter, which were afterwards put up by Sir Robert Walpole. Household articles of iron and brass have been picked up from time to time by workmen and gardeners, and the ground is still scattered and inlaid with fragments of brick and mortar. A magnificent pollard oak of great age and size stands near the back of the dwelling-place, and on its north side a defined space of soil of rich loam, which up to within a few years abounded with wild gooseberry and raspberry plants, indicates the locality of the ancient kitchen garden.

When this house and garden were still flourishing, and after the lapse of four centuries from the first settlement of the Walpoles at Houghton, one of the family, Thomas Walpole, appears to have been lord of the manor; it was he who added the north aisle to the church, who left money for the erection of his tomb, and also for "an abil prest to synge mass perpetually for his soul" in the chapel of St. Nicholas at Lynn. He died in January, 1513, having a son Edward, then thirty years old, who married Lucy, the sister of Sir John Robsart, of Syderstone; and whose son John Walpole became heir eventually to the hapless

furnished many of the traditions connected with Houghton which are mentioned in this article. In his *Houghton and the Walpoles*, published in 1865, an account of this early house is given, and much interesting information on the subject of Houghton and its successive owners.

Amye Robsart, whose pathetic story has been immortalized in the brilliant romance of Sir Walter Scott,[6] sung in the quaint ballad of Mickle, illustrated by the hand of modern art, and disputed, discussed, or confirmed by historian and antiquary ever since the day three hundred years ago, when the quiet meadows and river of Oxford "re-echoed with affright" the cry of death from the neighbouring mansion of Cumnor Place, where the tragedy was enacted which put an end to the heiress of the Robsarts, and transferred their family property to another name. In consequence of the death of Amye Robsart without children, and of the marriage of her aunt Lucy Robsart with Edward Walpole, Syderstone, with its roomy mansion and adjacent little church, its picturesque common stretching for miles, roughened by the furze and grass, among which we are told the sheep were pastured in those early days,—and Bircham, crossed by the old Roman road, and watered by its pools, the "sang-meres," suggestive of some long-forgotten battle,—became annexed to the Houghton estate, which has continued from that time to this to hold the legacy bequeathed to it by the far-off and mysterious occurrence of the night of September the 8th, 1560.

Although it has been sought more than once to establish the humane character of Anthony Forster, at whose house the death of Amye Robsart took place, and the innocence of Leicester, and although the materials thus brought forward, and evidence offered, involve the event in much doubt and perplexity, yet the popular impression, given so strongly by certain publications at and soon after the time, confirmed subsequently by the researches of Ashmole as narrated in his *Antiquities of Berkshire*, and deepened in later times by the

[6] It would, perhaps, be more just to say that *Kenilworth* is founded upon the story of Amye Robsart, rather than that it is a reproduction of it; the wide divergence from history being probably intentional, and adopted to enhance the effect of the novel.

story of Scott, and by the expressed conviction of Froude,[7] remains and would be difficult to efface, that a state of mind so melancholy, a fate so solitary and so unnatural, a death so early and so sudden, were the result of a cruel endeavour to remove from the world an existence which had become inconvenient and burdensome. The question is discussed at length in an article written for the Archæological Institute, by Mr. Pettigrew, in 1859, also in Mr. Adlard's *History of Amye Robsart and the Earl of Leicester*, and more recently in a paper by Canon Jackson, F.S.A.;[8] and from various sources, the story, shortly sketched, would seem to be as follows. A widow lady, Mrs. Appleyard, the possessor of Stanfield Hall and Rainthorpe in Norfolk, and the mother of three or four children, married, shortly after the death of her husband Roger Appleyard, Sir John Robsart, the owner of Syderstone. He had inherited that estate from his father, Sir Terry Robsart, who, with others of his family, is buried in the church of Syderstone. Sir John Robsart appears to have possessed a family house at Syderstone, where he and his sister Lucy were brought up, which lasted beyond the days when it devolved upon the son of Lucy and Edward Walpole of Houghton, and up to the time of Sir Robert Walpole, in whose marriage settlement it is mentioned. Amye, born about 1530, was the only child of Sir John and Lady Robsart, and although her birth is said to have taken place at Stanfield Hall, the property of her mother, and where she had the companionship of her half-brothers and sisters, the Appleyards, —the eldest of whom, John Appleyard, was much connected with her and her husband in after life,—it is probable that some periods of her childhood were passed in the house at Syderstone, in the neighbourhood of her relations at Houghton. The traces of walls, local tradition, and the

[7] Froude's *History of England*, vol. xii., p. 497.

[8] See note to page 241.

occasional finding of certain relics, attest to the existence of this house. Village stories of two old elm trees which grew in front of the Hall, of remembrances of the floor of a room and a hearthstone, of ruins filled up, of the finding of candlesticks, fireirons, gold coins, pieces of carved brick in the "Hall Lane,"—these, with the remains of extensive foundations near the church, spreading over a large space of ground now occupied by the house and garden of Syderstone Rectory, are the lingering evidences of the demolished abode of the Robsarts.

The marriage of Amye Robsart with Robert Dudley, a younger son of the Duke of Northumberland, he being eighteen, and she probably a year or two older, took place, in 1550, at Sheen, near Richmond, in the presence of King Edward VI.,[9] and the day after the marriage of his elder brother, Lord Lisle, with the daughter of the Duke of Somerset. If Sir John Robsart continued to live at Stanfield Hall,[1] it is not unlikely that Amye, upon her marriage with Sir Robert Dudley,[2] took possession of Syderstone as her home. There is a letter existing from her referring to the interests of herself and her husband there, and two years after their marriage, upon the death of Sir John Robsart, the estate was left to them. Eight years elapsed between the date of their marriage and the accession of Queen Elizabeth, soon after which Lord Robert was made a member of the Privy Council and was honoured with other marks of distinction, but it was not until after that event that he received the gift of a house at Kew, and not till long after the death of Amye, that of Kenilworth Castle.

[9] Lysons' *Environs of London* (ed. 1796), under Richmond and West Sheen, p. 449, and Burnett's *History of the Reformation*, vol. ii., part ii., p. 20 (ed. 1816), where King Edward's Journal of his own reign is printed. The original is in the Cottonian Collection, in the British Museum.

[1] "Sir John Robsart, Knight, and Dame Elizabeth his wife, dwelt in Stanfield Hall, in 1546."—Blomefield's *Norfolk*, vol. ii., p. 544.

[2] The Earl of Warwick became Duke of Northumberland in 1551.

Where Amye Dudley lived during those ten years of married life remains obscure: probably some time at Syderstone, and later, at the houses of friends, to judge by her well-known letter preserved in the British Museum, dated from Mr. Hyde's, and from her subsequent residence at Cumnor Place. So slight are the records or traces of those ten years, that two or three times only does her life rise out of the dimness in which it is wrapped. The first intimation of her is when she visits her husband in the Tower, three years after their marriage. His imprisonment there,—in consequence of the part he took in assisting to place Lady Jane Grey upon the throne,—the terrible events which took place in the Dudley family at that time, culminating in the execution of her youthful and brilliantly-accomplished sister-in-law, must have been startling and painful incidents in the life of Amye Robsart, brought up as she had been in the quiet seclusion of the old Norfolk manor houses. Her brother, John Appleyard, supported Lord Robert Dudley in the struggle against the Catholic party, and this, with Amye's visit to the Tower, seems to shew that she then shared the public interests and family society of the Dudleys, and was not entirely confined to the privacy of Norfolk or Berkshire, nor given over to the alienated and deserted condition into which she afterwards fell when her formidable rival ascended the throne. The ambition of her husband, the queen's passion for him, his court occupations and continual absence, must have rendered the marriage of Amye Robsart a lonely one, a supposition which is confirmed by the next trace of her, the letter before alluded to. This letter is on the subject of certain affairs at Syderstone; but it contains expressions indicative of disquiet and distress. She speaks of "her lord's departing," of his being occupied and troubled with weighty affairs, and owns that she forgot the necessary arrangements to be made at Syderstone, because she was "not altogether in

quiet for his sudden departing,"—an expressive phrase, in spite of the moderation of the language.

Perhaps there was about the circumstances of the marriage,—although as heiress to a good estate she was more than a match for Robert Dudley,—a touch of that incongruity which characterized the Lord of Burleigh, "not a lord in all the country is so great a lord as he," and his "village maiden," and she may have found that the rural training of her Norfolk home was scarcely the most fitting preparation for the faithful binding to her side of so brilliant and unprincipled a royal favourite as the future Earl of Leicester.

One other letter has been found from her, which has been recently brought to light, giving another touch of reality and detail to the somewhat slender narrative of her life. It is a letter to William Edney, a tailor in London,[3] giving an order for a velvet gown, written with a curious friendliness and courtesy, which would surprise the mantua-makers of the present day, and alluding to her previous gown

[3] This letter was discovered in 1865 by Canon Jackson among the papers at Longleat; a copy of it was brought to Norfolk by the late Mr. Frederick Walpole at the time, but it remained unpublished by him. It is inserted here by the permission of Canon Jackson, and as an extract from an article written by him on the subject of the papers found by himself at Longleat referring to Amye Robsart, in the *Wiltshire Archæological and Natural History Magazine*, vol. xvii., p. 47. The Longleat documents, connected with Amye Robsart, which have lately been given to the public by Canon Jackson, in the Appendix to the article, supply a number of facts hitherto unknown, of very great interest. One of the documents, a marriage settlement, is here quoted by his kind permission.

Amye, Lady Dudley's Letter to her Tailor.

"edney w^{t} my harty comendations thesse shalbe to desier you to take y^{e} paynes for me As to make this gowne of vellet whiche I sende you w^{t} suche A Collare as you made my rosset taffyta gowne you sente $\frac{me}{my}$ last

"of russet taffeta." This, and other items of attire which are contained in a bill of the said William Edney, are the only fragments of outward appearance which she has left

> & I will se you dyscharged for all I pray you let it be done w^{t} as muche speade as you can & sente by this bearar frewen the carryar of oxforde / & & thus I bed you most hartely fare well from comnare this xxiiij of avguste
>
> Your Assured frind
>
> Amye Duddley."

"To my very frinde will
yam / edney the tayler
y^{e} a
at tower rill geve
this
in London."

Covenant by John Dudley, Earl of Warwick (afterwards Duke of Northumberland) to settle Cokkisford Priory, co. Norfolk, and other lands, on his son, "Robert Duddeley, Esquyer," upon his intended marriage with Amye, daughter and heir of Sir John Robsart, Kt. (*Original at Longleat.*)

"This Indenture made the xxiiijth day of May in the fowerth year of the raign of our Soverayne Lord Edwarde the sixth by the grace of God of England Fraunce and Ireland Kinge, Defender of the faythe and in earth of the Churche of England and also of Ireland the supreme head Betwene the right honorable John Earle of Warwyke, Viscounte Lysle, of the honorable order of the gartyr knight and lorde grayte Mayster of the Kinge's moost honorable householde on thone partie and Syr John Robsert knyght of thother partie Wytnesseth that the said parties bene fully condiscended and agreed that a maryage shortely upon thensealinge herof shalbe hadd and solempnyzed betwene Robarte Duddeley esquyer one of the yonger sonnes of the said Erle and Amye Robsart daughter and heyre apparaunte to the said Syr John Robsart if the said Robart and Amye will thereunto condiscend and agree and in consideration of the said maryage eyther of the sayd parties dothe covenante and graunte to and with the other in manner and forme folowinge, that ys to say. Fyrste Whereas our saide soverayne Lorde the Kinge by his letters Patents bering date at Westminster the xxth day of Maii last past dyd amongest other things geve and graunte to the said Erle and hys heyres the reversion and reversions of all that his Scyte Cyrcuyte and Precincte of the late Pryory of Cokkysforde and of all that

behind her, no picture existing to yield a suggestion of the form and face which looked out from so dark a background in so gay a vesture. This letter is supposed to have been

the manor of Cokkysforde in the countie of Norfolk with all theyre rights members & appurtenances whatsoever they were to the said Pryory lately belongynge & aperteyning & late being parcell of the possessions and revenues of Thomas late Duke of Norfolk of high treason attaynted, and of all & every the howsings buyldings gardynes orchards lands and soyle within the said Scyte & precyncte of the said late Pryory of Cokkisforde, and of the Rectories and Churches of Est rudham West rudham Brounsthorpe and Barmer & the moytie of the Rectorie of Burneham and also of the manors and farmes of Est rudham West rudham Barmer Tytlesale Syddisterne Thorp market & Bradefylde with all theyre rights members & appurtenances whatsoever they be to the said late Pryory of Cokkesforde lately belonginge & apperteyning, and of the advocacion & right of patronage of the Vycarages of the said Churches of Est rudham West-rudham Brounsthorpe & Barmer aforesaid & of the moytie of the advocacion of the Vycarage of the said Churche of Burneham and of all that warren of conyes called Brokelinge, and of the courses of faldage of sheep called many ewes & wether course and of one course of faldage of sheep called Warren slake with theyre appurtenances in Est rudham aforesaid, & of one other course of faldage of sheep with the appurtenances called the Gouge in West rudham aforesaid, and of all other his Grace's lands tenements & hereditaments whatsoever they were in Est rudham West rudham Brounsthorpe Harpton Folsham Woodnorton Hillington Burneham Sydesterne Estbarsham Broughton Barmer Tatersett in the said countie of Norfolk or in any of them to the said late Pryory of Cokkisforde by any manner of way belonging or apperteyning as by the same letters Patents more at large may and doth appere Hyt ys now to be knowene by these presents that the said Erle for the consyderacons afforesaid hathe gyven granted bargayned and solde and by these presents dothe clerely geve grant bargayne and sell unto the said Robarte and Amye and to the heyres of the body of the said Robarte all that his reversion and reversions of all and singler the said premisses and all his tytle & interest in to & for the same premisses & every or any parte or parcell thereof, and that the said Erle and his heyres & every of them at all tymes hereafter for and duringe the tyme of one hole yere next and immedyatly ensuing the date of these presents shall do and suffre to be done all and every thinge & thinges act & actes which shalbe resonablely devised for the more better assurance of suer conveyaunce of the tytle and interest whiche the said Erle hath in to & for the premysses or any parte or parcell thereof to be had made & conveyed to the said Robarte & Amye & to the heyres of the body of the said Robarte & for defalte of soche issue to the right heyres of the said Erle for ever And

written very shortly before her death, and after the time when she had been consigned by her husband to the home and custody of Anthony Forster.

that the said Erle for the said consideracons aforesaid shall by good and lawful conveyaunce & assurance in the law geve graunte & assure unto the saide Robarte & Amye & to the longer lyver of them one annual or yerely rent of Fyftie Pounds of good and lawfull money of England with a clause of distres for non-payment thereof to be growinge owte of the manor of Burton Lysle in the countie of Leycester & of all other his lands tenements and hereditaments in Burton Lysle foresaid. To HAVE AND PARCEVE the said yerly rent of fyftie poundes unto the said Robarte and Amye & to the longer lyver of them from the day of the said maryage solempnysed, at the Feastes of St. Mychell th' archangell and the Annuncyacon of our Lady by even porcyons for and during the lyf of the Righte excellent Prynces the Lady Marie's grace sister to the King's Majestie if the said Lady Mary fortune so longe to be unmaryed with this Proviso to be conteyned in the said graunte that immedyatly from & after the Deathe of the said Lady Mary or that she fortune to be maryed that then & from thensforth the said graunte of the said yerly rent to be voyde & of no force in the law AND over that the said Erle covenanteth & promyseth to & with the said Syr John Robsart to pay unto the said Syr John Robsart at th enselinge of these presents the sum of Too Hundred Powndes of good and lawfull money of England wherof the said Syr John Robsart clerly acquyteth & dischargeth the said Erle his heyres & executors by these presents AND the said Syr John Robsart covenanteth and graunteth for hym his heyres & executors to & with the said Erle his heyres & executors that he the said Syr John Robsart, & the Lady Elizabeth his wife shall at the proper costs & charges in the law of the said Erle his heyres or executors do and suffre to be done all and every soche resonable acte & actes thinge and thinges wherby the manors of Sydisterne, and Newton juxta Byrcham in the countie of Norfolk, the manor of greate Byrcham in the said countie of Norfolk, & the manor of Bulkham in the countie of Suffolk and all & singular those lands tenements & hereditaments accepted reputed letten knowen or taken as any parte parcell or membre of the said manors or of any parte or parcell thereof or being letten to or with any of them with theyre appurtenances being parcell of the inherytaunce of the said Syr John Robsart shall and may be conveyed to the said Syr John Robsart during his lif without impechement of any manner of waste, the rem' thereof to the said lady Elyzabeth duringe her lyf, the rem' thereof to the said Robart and Amye and to the heyres of the body of the said Amye and for defalte of soche issue the rem' thereof to the ryght heyres of the said Sir John Robsarte for ever. AND over that the said Syr John Robsart covenanteth granteth & promyseth to & with the said Erle his

There stood at this time on the borders of Berkshire, about midway between Oxford and Abingdon, a large quadrangular house built close to the church of Cumnor; its massive walls, and gables of irregular height, surrounding a court, the rooms and galleries lighted by pointed Gothic windows, with a garden lying under the broad south front, and encircled by a small park abounding in fish-ponds, and terminated by terraces overlooking the sloping ground and valleys of the adjacent country. This house, built for the summer residence of the abbots of the neighbouring monastery of Abingdon, had passed into the hands of a man who had some connection with Lord Robert Dudley, who at the time of the reputed murder rented the place, who afterwards bought it, and eventually bequeathed it to Lord Robert. In the south-west corner of this abode an apartment was, according to tradition, assigned to Amye Dudley: the elegant arched window of her chamber looked into the court, straight upon the chapel in the opposite

heyres and executors that he the said Syr John Robsart shall well & truely during his lyf if hit fortune the said Robarte & Amye so longe to lyve, content & pay to the said Robarte yerly during the said terme the sum of Twenty Powndes of good and lawfull money of England to be paid at fower times in the yere that ys to say at the Feaste of St. Mychell tharchangell, the nativitie of our Lord th annuncyacon of our lady and the natyvytie of saynt John Baptist by even porcions. And also the said Syr John Robsart covenaunteth promyseth & graunteth to & with the said Erle that yf hit shall fortune the said Robarte and Amye & the heyres of theyre too bodyes lawfully betwene them begotten or any of them to outlyve the said Syr John Robsart and the lady Elizabeth his wife that then the said Robarte & Amye & the heyres of theyre too bodyes or one of them shall after the decesse of the said Syr John Robsart & the lady Elizabeth have and enjoy of the fre gifte will and legacie of the said Syr John Robsart the nombre of Thre Thowsand Shepe to be left in a stokke goinge on the premisses in Norfolk & Suffolk foresaid. In Wytnes wherof to thone parte of these presents remayning with the said Erle the said Syr John Robsart hath put his seale, and to thother parte remayning with the said Syr John Robsart the said Erle hathe put his seale the day and yere fyrste above wrytten.

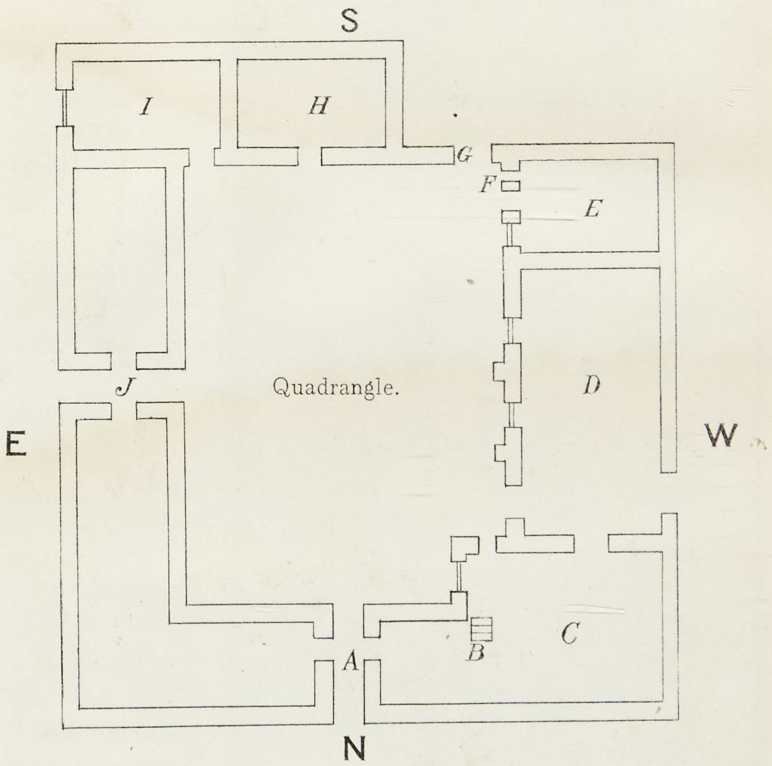
J. Warwyk."

corner, and over the roof of the house on to the church tower beyond. Close to the room was an ornamented doorway, in the south wall of the house, which led into the garden.[4] Here, after her visit to the Hydes in the neighbourhood, (from whose house one of her letters is dated) she lived for some time in retirement, her companions probably being Anthony Forster, his wife, and the Owens, of whom the house was rented. She had certainly a large retinue of servants, and one maid "who did dearlie love her;" but that she did not share the family life is shewn by a letter written by a visitor to Cumnor immediately after her death, in which her selecting one companion for dinner is mentioned; and, according to the assertions of those who surrounded her, she was "of a strange minde," and passionate, but much given to prayer of a sad and agonizing character, "prayers to God to deliver her from desperation." Anthony Forster, her guardian, although reckoned a man of superior education and cultivated tastes, and the inscription on whose tombstone endows him with every virtue, has descended to posterity with a very doubtful reputation, and is unfavourably connected with the sombre notoriety which attaches to Cumnor Place. One Sunday towards the end of the summer of 1560, Lady Robert Dudley, according to some authorities, but more probably Forster himself, insisted upon her whole establishment at Cumnor betaking themselves to the fair which was going on at Abingdon, four miles distant. She then arranged that one of the two ladies staying in the house should dine with her on this day, when the large rambling old house must have been strangely silent without the presence of the band of servants who usually peopled it. Everyone knows the stillness and brightness of a long September afternoon, a stillness

[4] The plan of Cumnor Place, given in illustration, has been supplied by A. D. Bartlett, Esq., of Abingdon, in whose *Historical and Descriptive Account of Cumnor Place*, published in 1850, it first appeared.

Ground Plan of Cumnor Place.

As correctly as it can be traced.



A Entrance to the Quadrangle.
B Staircase to the Long Gallery, &c.
C Supposed Buttery.
D Hall.
E Room known as the Butler's Pantry.
F Door leading to Lady Dudley's Chamber.
G Entrance to the Garden.
H Part converted into a Malthouse.
I The Chapel.
J Arch into Churchyard.

and brightness which on this occasion contrasted as strongly with the event of the coming night as did the gaiety of the neighbouring fair, or the quiet peace of a rural Sabbath day. As the sun gradually left the southern walls of the quadrangle and sank to westward, the shadows from the tall gable in the corner of the house, which contained the rooms destined to be so fatally associated, crept slowly across the court, until the evening closed in; when Amye Dudley, leaving the suite of apartments she usually inhabited,—taking unawares, "as from a deathbed, her last living leave"[4] of the outward world,—retired to occupy the large bedchamber (on the same side, but at the other end of the building,) in which she had been unaccountably directed to sleep that night, and which communicated by a door with a winding stone staircase leading down to a room called the Buttery, underneath. This circular flight of steps started from a point in the "buttery" not far from the main entrance of the house, and gave access, after passing the door of the bed-room, to a gallery which extended the whole length of the north front of the building. The chamber, a spacious and lofty one, anciently the dormitory of the monks, looked out by a fine Gothic window into the court. No other window connected this room with the outer scene, or relieved the loneliness of its situation. At the back of it were the now deserted offices; beneath, the large, low, dimly-lighted buttery; the bed's head was placed close to the door at the top of the staircase; the nearest part of the house was the broad corridor over the north entrance, called the Long Gallery.

Before the return of the servants, and in the dusk of the autumn evening, the door was opened, and, whether by murder or mishap, there followed the ugly violent crash, which left a helpless heap at the foot of the stone stairs,

[4] Richard II., Act v., scene i.

and changed the obscure and insignificant reputation of the lady into her subsequent character as a heroine of romance.[5]

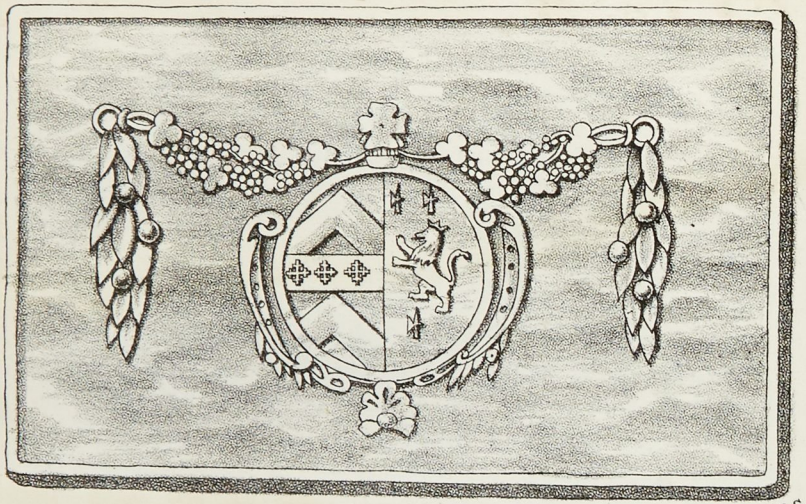
A coroner's inquest ensued, and then a grand funeral procession to the church of St. Mary's at Oxford,[6] at which, however, her husband was not present; and Cumnor Place fell into disrepute and ruin, a terror to the neighbourhood, and was finally demolished at the beginning of the present century. The spirit of Amye Robsart continued, so said the villagers, to haunt for some time the foot of the stone staircase, dressed in superb attire; but, if ghosts can travel, the legend may be true, that Syderstone Rectory also shared the post-mortem visits of its former occupant, and has echoed sometimes to sounds strange and incomprehensible from the reputed "ghost room" of that habitation.

The historical evidence which throws the most light upon these events is the correspondence between Lord Robert Dudley and Thomas Blount, which is preserved among the Pepys papers. These letters, from which the previous details have been extracted, have been printed and published several times, and are therefore generally accessible:[7] they are curiously interesting, and seem to be the best means of approaching the truth of the Cumnor tragedy, the account of Ashmole, being, according to Mr. Pettigrew, and also in the opinion of Canon Jackson, a perverted narrative of the occurrence. Mr. Pettigrew considers that the death

[5] The window described was removed, in 1810, to Wytham church, where it was placed in the east wall of the chancel.

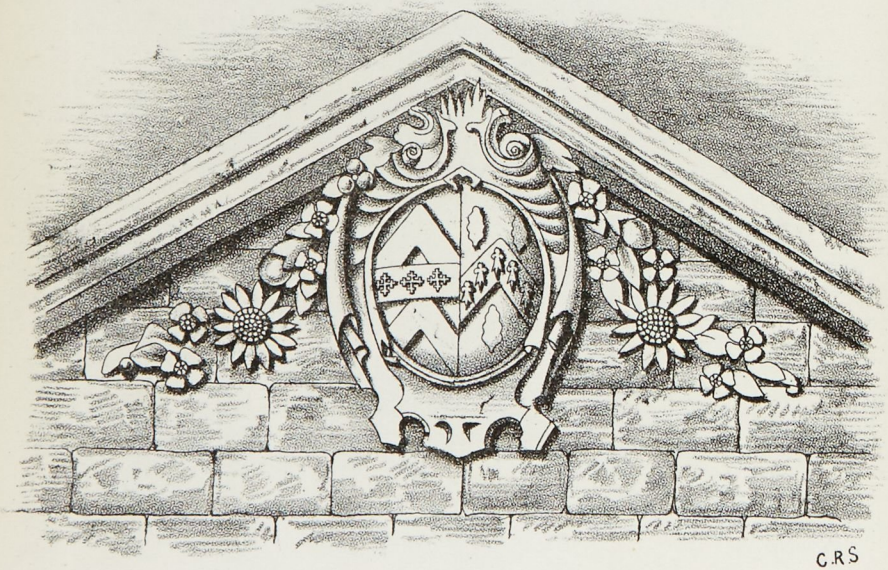
[6] In the *Gentleman's Magazine* for 1850, p. 125, a transcript is given of the account of the funeral, taken from the MS. in the Ashmolean collection.

[7] The letters, contemporary copies of the originals, are said to have been lent by John Evelyn to Pepys, who failed to return them. They are printed in Pepys' *Diary*, the edition published 1848, by Lord Braybrooke, vol. i., the Appendix to which contains the letters. They were discovered about that date in the Pepysian library, at Cambridge, and were then published for the first time. In the same year they were also published by Craik, in his *Romance of the Peerage*, vol. i., Appendix No. 1, p. 400. They have since appeared in Adlard's *Amy Robsart and the Earl of Leicester*.



C.R.S

ARMS OF WALPOLE AND ROBSART ON A STONE SLAB
PRESERVED AT HOUGHTON.



C.R.S

ARMS OF WALPOLE AND BURWELL

of Amye Robsart was caused by accident, and some colour is given to that view of the event by the immediate summoning of a coroner's inquest,—by the request of Robert Dudley that the near relations of his wife, John Appleyard and Arthur Robsart, should be present at that inquest,—by the verdict of the jury, "Death by mischance,"—and by the good character which was then borne by Anthony Forster; but, when recalling the desire of Lord Robert Dudley to marry the Queen,—his neglect of his wife,—the total want of any expression either of sorrow or surprise in his letter written on the reception of the tidings of her death,—his immediate solicitude lest he should be suspected,—the fact of her being placed in the house of his servant Forster,—the absence of her household, and the otherwise unaccountable change of chamber on the fatal night,—the strong popular impression at the time that a murder had been committed,—the previous whisper at Court that such a murder was contemplated,[7]—it is difficult to lift the shadow of guilt which first settled over, and has ever since darkened, the details of this story.

In the church at Syderstone, the memory of Amye Robsart is preserved by a time-worn representation in stone, over the entrance, of the bear and ragged staff, the badge of Lord Robert Dudley; and at Houghton there is to be seen a piece of stained-glass which records the union of the Robsart and Walpole families—the coat of arms in the east window of the south aisle of the church. There is also at Houghton, now placed over the mantelpiece of the "Audit Room," a carved stone shield, Walpole impaling Robsart, which, if contemporary with the marriage of Edward Walpole and Lucy Robsart, must have belonged to the

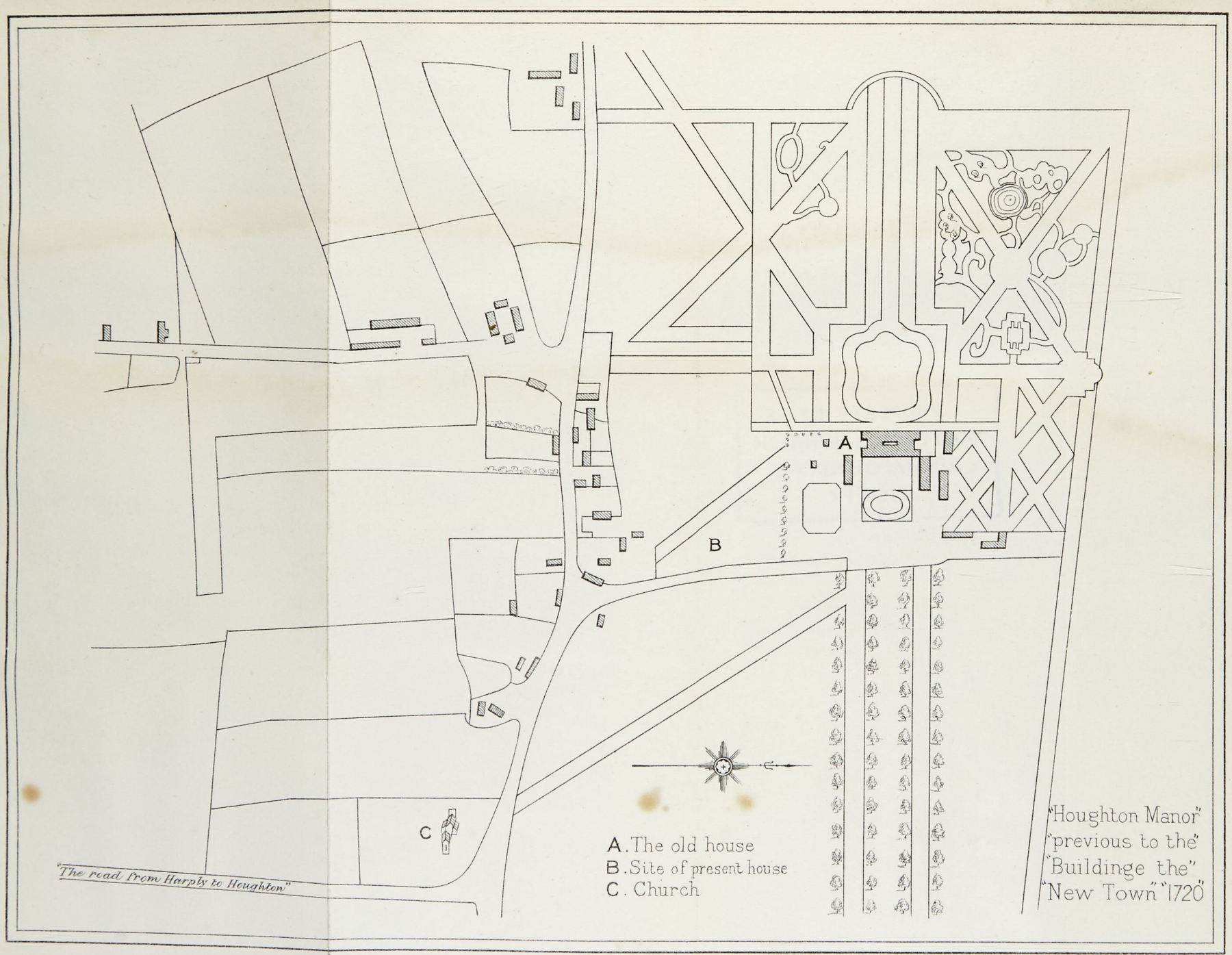
[8] In an article in *Fraser's Magazine* for June, 1861, Froude mentions that the Spanish ambassador received intelligence from Cecil, Lord Burleigh, that the wife of Lord Robert Dudley was about to be murdered, and was at that moment (the autumn of 1560) guarding herself from poison.

oldest of the three houses, that alliance having taken place before the middle of the sixteenth century.

The death of Lucy, the aunt of Amye Robsart, occurred in 1559; she was buried at Houghton; her burial forming one of that long series of family interments which took place in the church there generation after generation, even to that of the last and most brilliant Walpole of Houghton, who,—although his life was spent in such different scenes, and in a polished circle of social, literary, and political interests, as far removed as can possibly be imagined from the rural dulness of Houghton, of which perhaps he had too keen a sense,—still returned at length to the inevitable family vault, and lies under a blank stone slab, the only record of his death being that in the parish register: "Horace Walpole, late Earl of Orford, aged 80 years, was buried March ye 13th, 1797. A Bachelor."

After the lapse of nearly a hundred years from the time of Amye Robsart, the estates devolved on Sir Edward Walpole, a Royalist, who commenced the building of the second mansion at Houghton, the house which was the birthplace of his celebrated grandson, which lasted less than a century, and which was demolished in 1722 to make way for the grander edifice which represented more adequately the fame and fortunes of Sir Robert Walpole.

Sir Edward's son, Robert Walpole, born in 1650, was the father of Sir Robert; he married Mary, daughter and heiress of Sir Jeffrey Burwell, of Rougham in Suffolk: they lived in this second house, to which he probably added some finishing touches; among others, his own arms and those of his wife. This coat of arms was carved in stone very handsomely, ornamented with a massive wreath of scroll-work, and large clear-cut sun-flowers, and now finds a place close under the peak of a tall gable which forms part of the line of building of the present stables and coach-houses, where the white stone combines picturesquely with


A
B
C
A. The old house
B. Site of present house
C. Church
"The road from Harply to Houghton"
"Houghton Manor"
"previous to the"
"Buildinge the"
"New Town" "1720"

the warm red carstone and background of blue sky, but seems now, after representing the union of Robert Walpole and Mary Burwell, and overshadowing the fledging of their very numerous family,—

> "And I have shadowed many a group
> Of beauties, that were born
> In teacup times of hood and hoop,
> Or when the patch was worn"—

to find its only use in harbouring an enormous quantity of swallows, which may be seen any summer morning, dipping, whirling, and darting round the old escutcheon.

From a plan which is now at Houghton, a copy of which is given in illustration, the situation of the house is easily ascertained, and the very slight indications which remain of it are identified. It stood at a short distance north of the present building, facing eastward; the two round kerb-stones, on either side the entrance gate, which opened into the court in front, are still visible, about eight feet apart, and further on, remains of the portico have been found. An angle not far from this is planted with trees: they seem to have been put in to mark the spot which had bounded one corner of the house; further back, pieces of tile, slate, and other remains, indicate the whereabouts of the stables.

Robert Walpole, who was the father of some remarkable children, inherited this house early in life, Sir Edward Walpole dying in 1667. He was member for Castle Rising from the year 1688 until his death at fifty, in 1700;[9] and during this important time he is described as "a warm friend to the Revolution;—and, at home, as an active country gentleman, of high honour and integrity, much devoted to a country life, extremely hospitable, and of a convivial temperament."[1] Of this pleasant and intelligent personage

[9] Collins's *Baronage*, p. 677.

[1] Cox's *Life of Horatio Lord Walpole.*

there is a portrait at Houghton,[2] an oval picture, in dark green coat slashed with white, and large wig and bands, with a keen and shrewd expression on the round fair face. A descendant of the Walpoles possesses at this moment an old manuscript book which belonged to the wife of Mr. Robert Walpole, and which is in her own handwriting. It is called "Madam Walpol's Receipt book," and, among other entries, gives a list of her children, beginning with "ye age of all my children," by which it appears that eleven sons and eight daughters were born to Robert and Mary Walpole, in the space of twenty-two years.[3] Coxe, in his allusions to Dorothy Lady Townshend, one of the daughters, mentions that she was "educated in the country," and the other children were, no doubt, brought up in their early years in the same manner. Tradition, handed down in the

[2] Over the door of the "small parlour."

[3] This list is quoted by Coxe, in his *History of Sir Robert Walpole*, when the MS. was in the possession of the Rev. Horace Hamond, but the following extract is from the original volume.

Ye Age of all my chilldren.

1. Susan was borne one Wednesday ye six of June 1672.
2. Mary was borne one Sunday ye eight of June 1673.
3. Edward was born on Tuesday ye twenty third of June 1674.
4. Burwell was borne on Thursday ye twenty six of August 1675.
5. Robertt was borne on Saterday ye twenty six of August 1676.
6. John was borne on Monday ye third of September 1677.
7. Horatio was born on Sunday ye eight December } 1678.
8. Christopher was born on Fryday ye twenty of February } 1679.
9. Elizabeth was born on Thursday ye twenty fourth March 1680.
10. Elizabeth was born on Thursday ye seaven tenth October 1682.
11. Gallfridus was born on Saterday ye fiftenth March 1683.
12. Ann was born Monday ye six Aprell 1685.
13. Dorathy was born Saterday ye eight tenth September 1686.
14. Susan was born Munday ye fift of December 1687.
15. Mordaunt was born Thirsday ye thirtenth December 1688.
16. A boy still born ye eight of Aprell 1690.
17. Charles was born ye thirty of June 1691.
18. William was born fryday ye seven of Aprull 1693.
19. A daughter still born ye twenty of January, 1694-95.

locality, has yielded some few hints as to the childhood and training of Sir Robert Walpole, and has preserved some fragments of information as to his earliest education.

Not far from the house, and close to the church, was a road skirted by some fine old elm trees, three of which remain, where Sir Jeffery Burwell, the grandfather of Sir Robert, is reported to have taught the future statesman his letters. Looking at the church, and at the distinct traces of the old road near it, those two figures rise up and present themselves: the boy (to judge by the portrait taken of him some years later on as a young man) with chubby bright complexion, marked eyebrows, well-formed curved mouth, and the nose, slightly "retroussé," which appeared then in most of the Walpole faces; dressed in the long-skirted coat, deep cuffs, and buckled shoes of those days—a quaint sturdy little form, at an age when he certainly "smiled without art"[4] whatever may have been his custom afterwards—and, with the child, his old grandfather, pacing up and down, initiating him into the mysteries of the alphabet; the green foliage above them, the road and chequered shade beneath their feet, the gnarled stems and the church on their right hand, the village cross and village sounds close by.

The ground under the elm trees, although the road is obliterated, is still called "Sir Jeffery's Walk," and the remembrance is preserved of the childish lessons which went on there. The old fruit garden must also have been a favourite haunt of this pair, and of the numerous family

[4] "Go see Sir Robert—
See Sir Robert!—hum—
* * * * * * *
Seen him I have, but in his happier hour
Of social pleasure, ill-exchanged for power;
Seen him, uncumbered with the venal tribe,
Smile without art, and win without a bribe."
Pope's *Epilogue to the Satires*, Dialogue i., v. 26.

of brothers and sisters who swarmed about the house, many of them subsequently well known in Norfolk and elsewhere: Horatio, afterwards Lord Walpole of Wolterton; Galfridus, who distinguished himself in the navy; Dorothy, the future "lady in brown," who has floated about Raynham so mysteriously for the last hundred and fifty years; Mary, afterwards the wife of Sir Charles Turner; Susan, who married Anthony Hamond of Westacre, and who is so amusingly alluded to by Horace Walpole in one of his letters, as "my ancient aunt Hamond, who came over to Lynn to see me, not from any affection, but curiosity," and who rebuked her nephew for sitting instead of standing when he was chaired at the Lynn Election:—"Child, you have done a thing that your father never did in his life; you sat as they carried you." "Madam, when I am placed in a chair, I conclude I am to sit in it,"—and other sons and daughters, nineteen in all, who peopled the house, enlivened the precincts, and frequented the convenient adjacent garden. Turning to the right on leaving the portico, a door, of which the thick oak planks are unimpaired, led from the front of the house into this garden. A large gateway in the same wall, and another small doorway, surmounted by a stone architrave on the east, or what is now the park side, also gave admittance to the enclosure. It was a walled garden of good size, and placed on the southern side of the court. The nails and shreds which held the fruit still linger in the old red walls, the oaken door still creaks upon its hinges, the sunshine broods upon the space, and lights up its empty corners; but the spot "where once the garden smiled" is disused and deserted, and all that now adjoins it is the dilapidated side of a wing belonging to the present house, which was half destroyed by fire some years ago, and whose blank windows look down in kindred forlornness upon the scene beneath.

Some further slight record remains of the early education

of Sir Robert Walpole, who was the third son of this family, but who, surviving the brothers born before him, became eventually heir to the estates. Besides the traditional instructions of his grandfather Sir Jeffery Burwell, a "horn book" now at Houghton, bound in white parchment, and filled with childish attempts at arithmetic, suggests the tedious process by which the elements of that science were acquired which afterwards developed into the calculations of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. The story has also been handed down, that later he was sent daily to Massingham on a pony, a distance of about five miles, to receive lessons in reading, writing, and arithmetic, given in a room over the church porch of that place, when some village *savant* "taught his little school."

The situation of Houghton, from the vicinity of the village, was then more cheerful than now, when the magnificent monotony of the park is unbroken save by the house itself. At the end of the seventeenth century, and up to 1729, the village lay around the church, and very near the house. The foundations of the houses are traceable; the well is to be seen; the cross stands there now, its pedestal worn on the west side into hollows by the kneeling worshippers; and the church was then undefaced by the tasteless later additions to the tower. The removal of the village of Houghton, from its situation within the park and around the church, was one of the changes afterwards made by Sir Robert Walpole; a record of which is to be found in the parish register: "July 4, 1729, the foundation was dug for the two first houses of the new town."

It has been often stated that this depopulation of the familiar site suggested to Goldsmith the idea of his "Deserted Village."[5] The truth possibly is that this event at Houghton, which happened forty years before the "Deserted Village"

[5] Besides the popular statement, the assertion that such was the case has been transmitted by successive possessors of Houghton.

was written, came to the knowledge of Goldsmith in the course of his researches into such subjects, and furnished some of the details which were worked into his poem. There were, certainly, in the removal of the houses, some cases of hardship involved. Hints have survived of shattered homes and broken hearts; instances are given of families deprived of their fragment of land, and their family homestead; not far from the hall is a field, and the outlines of the foundations of a house, still called "Naboth's Vineyard," from the tradition of its owner's misfortunes; and, notwithstanding the softening circumstances that the new village was established a short distance only from the original spot, (but outside the park gates, and much further from the church), and that the houses were commodiously built, and probably superior to the older ones, it is not unlikely that Goldsmith alluded to Sir Robert Walpole in certain lines towards the close of his poem of the "Traveller," on the same subject afterwards developed in the "Deserted Village," which depict with singular exactness the process that took place at Houghton.

> "Have we not seen . . . . . .
> Seen opulence, her grandeur to maintain,
> Lead stern depopulation in her train,
> And over fields where scattered hamlets rose,
> In barren solitary pomp repose?
> Have we not seen, at pleasure's lordly call,
> The smiling long-frequented village fall?"

The sympathy of Goldsmith with the wrongs of those he considered oppressed is well known: he held the opinion that a poet should "address popular sympathies, study the people, and, above all, the joys and sorrows of the poor;" these principles are immortalized as his own in the "Deserted Village," which, so far as such inspired verse can fulfil the very secondary purpose of pointing a moral, may be said, generally, to be written to embody the complaint of the

poor, and to condemn the abuse of power; although the lesson really conveyed would rather be to remind Progress, in its aspirations after final good, of the temporary suffering inflicted by its footstep during the march towards success.

For the purpose of gathering the facts necessary for the carrying out of his purpose, Goldsmith made many excursions into different parts of England. In his letter to Sir Joshua Reynolds, prefixed to the poem of the "Deserted Village," he says: "How far you may be pleased with the versification and mere mechanical parts of this attempt, I do not pretend to inquire; but I know you will object that the depopulation it deplores is nowhere to be seen, and the disorders it laments are only to be found in the poet's own imagination. To this I can scarce make any other answer than that I sincerely believe what I have written, and that I have taken all possible pains in my country excursions, for these four or five years past, to be certain of what I allege; and that all my views and enquiries have led me to believe those miseries real, which I here attempt to display." The Irish village of Lissoy, in West Meath, claims to be identified with "Sweet Auburn:" it was the place in which the childhood of Goldsmith was passed, and underwent changes of a kind similar to those at Houghton; but the passages in the poem indicative of personal attachment towards the locality described, on which the supposed identity is based, are no more to be taken literally and autobiographically in this instance than in the many other poems where individual sentiment is assumed and expressed by the writer; and the many country excursions, extending over several years, to which Goldsmith refers as yielding materials for his poem, the character of its descriptions, so essentially English, the numerous lines which apply so fitly to Houghton, such as the description of the village inn, the allusions to the greatness and power of the possessor of the land,—justify the conjecture that, in the

composition of the "Deserted Village," recollections of the traditions of Houghton may have been woven into the substance of the poet's tale, and that the distinct and tender colours of that exquisite *genre* picture may not impossibly represent for us the bygone joys and sorrows of the Norfolk hamlet.

The "Deserted Village" was published in May, 1770,—"This day at 12 will be published, price two shillings, The Deserted Village, a Poem, by Doctor Goldsmith."—(*Public Advertiser* of May 26th, 1770)—twenty-five years after the death of Sir Robert Walpole. There appears to have been some prejudice in Goldsmith's mind against the great man, which was expressed in occasional sarcasms, and which was perhaps the cause of the dislike evinced by Horace Walpole towards Goldsmith. These two were, notwithstanding, often together, and their frequent intercourse is alluded to from time to time in the letters of the former.

To return, however, to an earlier period,—before the poetry of Goldsmith or the *Letters* of his contemporary had enlivened the world, and to continue the picture of Houghton at the end of the previous century,—the background of the sketch is filled in for us by the indications of the old map before referred to, which gives the relative position of house, roads, village, and church; and the figures in the foreground are completed by the addition to their number of a member of another Norfolk family, whose history is almost as long and as interesting as that of the Walpoles themselves.

At this period, Robert Walpole, the father of Sir Robert, had been left guardian to the child of his friend and neighbour, Horatio, first Viscount Townshend, who died in 1687, leaving his son heir of Raynham at the age of thirteen. The beautiful house on that estate, finished by his grandfather Sir Roger Townshend about 1620, built in a style both picturesque and stately, on a plan at once

spacious and compact, much exceeded the abode at Houghton, at the time in question, in size and importance. There is no known connection between the Townshends and Walpoles before this time, but both families had run almost parallel, as it were, for many hundred years in Norfolk; both tracing back their descent to an early period; both possessing neighbouring estates in unbroken succession from the thirteenth century; both in the course of their family annals, taking part and rendering service, by means of the resources of their own locality, in public and political events, especially during the changes of the seventeenth century; both acquiring peerages; both gradually culminating in importance until the eighteenth century, when the most noted members of each family, Sir Robert Walpole, Horace Walpole, Charles second Viscount Townshend, and Charles Townshend, his grandson, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, raised their respective houses to the brighest epoch of their history.

The young Viscount Townshend, who was left under the care of Robert Walpole, and who eventually became distinguished, first, as the Ambassador of Queen Anne at the Hague, and afterwards as Secretary of State in the reign of George I., would seem, early in life, according to the account given of him by Coxe, to have been desirous to ally himself with the family of his guardian. But the guardian and father "invariably refused his consent to the marriage of his daughter Dorothy with Charles Lord Viscount Townshend, lest he should be suspected of forming a match so advantageous to his family by improper means." As, however, at the time of her father's death in 1700, Dorothy was scarcely fifteen, the idea must have been rather a premature one; Lord Townshend it appears was twelve years older than herself, and married his first wife in 1699; after her death, he returned to his former attachment, and his alliance with the Walpoles finally took place in July,

1713. Dorothy, who was at the time of her marriage about twenty-six years old, is well known by means of the three or four pictures in Norfolk, and elsewhere, which have handed down her beauty, giving to this daughter of the Walpoles a somewhat prominent place among their family portraits. The one at Houghton represents her as of slender figure and bright brunette complexion, with the dark eyes and expressive countenance which were also characteristic of her brother, Sir Robert. The dark background, the blue-green dress, the brown abundant hair, the brilliant colouring of the flesh tints, make up a pleasant picture; there is another, which was in the collection at Strawberry Hill, with the same gaiety of expression; but that at Raynham, taken later in life, gives an altogether different impression, still beautiful, but the youthful aspect gone, and changed for a preoccupied melancholy look, which it is supposed that the circumstances of her life contributed to justify.

It seems impossible to reconcile the tradition at Raynham of the harsh conduct of her husband, and the suspicion of a violent death, with the historical account given of her, which is as follows:—

"During Mr. Walpole's continuance in England, he experienced a domestic misfortune in the decease of his sister, Lady Townshend, who died of the smallpox, on the 29th of March, 1726. This elegant and accomplished woman was a severe loss to her husband and family; she greatly contributed, by her engaging manners, to enliven the fatigue of business, in which Lord Townshend was involved. Though educated in the country, and unaccustomed, till her marriage, to the manners of a Court, she soon acquired great ease and address; and, when she accompanied her husband to Hanover, 'gave,' as Lord Waldegrave expresses himself in a letter to Mr. Walpole, 'with so much good humour into the ways of the country, that she pleased everybody to admiration.—Hanover, Dec. 19th, 1725.'

"Her death was the greatest misfortune at this critical juncture, on account of the growing misunderstanding between Lord Townshend and Sir Robert Walpole, which her influence with her husband and

brother had greatly contributed to diminish. She died in the 40th year of her age, generally and justly lamented for her uncommon merit, and the accomplishments that adorned her mind as well as her person."—Coxe's *Life of Horatio Lord Walpole*, p. 111.

Whatever the causes may have been which suggested the very different traditional story in the Townshend family, and gave rise to the vague tale of the mysterious immurement, the mock funeral, the restless lady haunting at dusk the oak staircase at Raynham, this description seems rather to give the impression that the life of Dorothy Walpole was a prospered one, her career successful, and her death, much regretted, caused by an ordinary illness.

After her death, Lord Townshend's differences with Sir Robert Walpole gradually became more definite; they are attributed to private causes, as well as to political jealousy, and ended in the breach which probably strengthened Lord Townshend's resolution to pass the remainder of his life, after his resignation in 1729, in the seclusion of Raynham.

The history of Sir Robert Walpole is too recent and too well known, to find a place in an archæological journal: his childhood at Houghton,—his inheritance of the estate and his marriage in the same year, 1700,—his election for Lynn in 1702,—his demolition of the old house and village,—his building of the new house,—his decoration of this with the famous gallery of pictures, are matters of local interest which gather round, and grow out of, any notice of the place; such are also the suggestions of his life and doings during his frequent residences; but his political career, the admiration and the obloquy which have alike attached themselves to his name; his vicissitudes of fortune during the reign of Anne; his devotion to the house of Hanover; his long tenure of power, as head of the governments of George I. and George II., from 1721 to 1742; his influence with Queen Caroline; his friendship with

Marlborough; his vigour in resisting the antagonism of Bolingbroke, of Carteret, of the Prince of Wales; his tendency to a peaceful and benign policy; his inconsistency in the question of the Spanish war; his system of securing the votes of the House of Commons; the opposition and censure he incurred, whether justly or not, in consequence of that system; his resignation in 1742, and retirement into private life for good,—are all particulars which belong to the public and national annals of that time, and form a part of the chronicle of England during the last century, but which enhance immeasurably the interest of Houghton, and invest it with the dignity of historical ground.

Sir Robert was made Earl of Orford on quitting the ministry, and spent the last years of his life mainly at Houghton. His occupations and amusements at this time, and still more during previous periods of his residence at Houghton, are clearly enough indicated. The long journey from London—broken by the arrival at Swaffham, where Sturge, his Norfolk runner, a Houghton man, met the travellers, and, dressed in flannel and belted, ran with a lighted torch in his hand, in front of the carriage, all the way to Houghton—almost justified the dread with which Horace Walpole anticipated these pilgrimages. "I am settling my affairs, not that I am going to be married or to die, but something as bad as either: you will guess that it can only be going to Houghton." Sir Robert, however, was of a different opinion, and frequented, filled, and enlivened Houghton with a relish and goodwill of which there are abundant traces. His expresses to London were despatched by the trusty messenger just described, who performed the long distance on foot, whilst his master and the guests were laying bets upon his chances of getting over the ground, and the time of his return. These guests were occasionally royal personages: a letter in the possession of a gentleman in Norfolk gives an account of a visit of the

Grand Duke of Tuscany to Houghton,[6] when the cavalcade of visitors and gentry going out hunting could "only be compared to an army in its march."[7] There was stabling at Houghton for eighty horses: the characteristic picture of Sir Robert in hunting costume, standing by the side of his horse, preserves a memorial of these animated days. The parties at Houghton, consisting of political and local guests, were kept up with a festivity suited to the humour of the host. Bull-baiting was one of the amusements carried on, on a large space of grass south of the house, which still shews remains of the arrangements requisite for the sport. The large punch glasses, ten or twelve inches high, with diameter in proportion, which are now ranged innocently on the shelves of the china room, bring visions of lavish feasts. There is a strange little room at the back of a servants' hall, opening out of it by a door close to the chimney, called the "Sots' Hole," where the drunken footmen were thrown, to recover themselves, and to become fitted anew to assist their scarcely more sober masters.

Quieter moments, nevertheless, had their turn; days in which the amusements of Sir Robert were limited to superintending the planting of the park, or to watching the growth of the avenues of beech-trees whose rich foliage and grand marbled stems are now so noticeable; making these home excursions by the aid of the familiar relic now in the lumber-room over the stables, a ponderous gig, lined with green velvet, wheelless and shaftless, but with the arms and order of the Bath emblazoned on either side.

On these quieter days, too, were arranged, with the help of his son Horace, the many pictures bought by Sir Robert at different times, and transferred by him from

[6] His Royal Highness, Francis, Duke of Lorraine, afterwards Grand Duke of Tuscany.

[7] The extract is furnished by the Rev. J. H. Broome, to whom the letter had been communicated.

Downing Street[8] and Arlington Street to Houghton; and the valuable collection of books in the library, mostly placed there by himself, many of them choice presentation copies, were, although he made no profession of scholarship, looked over or studied, to judge by the fragments of his handwriting in some of them. One of these books, *Marcelli Malpighii, Philosophi, Dissertatio, &c.*, contains, in his clear and excellent handwriting, the inscription,—"Ex dono amplissimi viri Georgii Seignior.—R. Walpole."

More sombre days there were too; when the illness was coming on which gradually vanquished even his spirits and constitution, and from which he died about three years after his exit from public life. The details of the illness are touchingly given in Horace Walpole's letters of the spring of 1745; his death took place in London, but his funeral, like those of all his lineal predecessors, was solemnized at Houghton, where the stone in the church beneath which the remains of that stirring brain and vigorous hand lie quiet and cold, is, unaccountably enough, unadorned by any inscription. The spot where his coffin stands in the vault,—surrounded by six others, those of his two wives, of his daughter, of his two sons, Robert and Horace, and his grandson George, a mute family reunion,—is known and identified; his reputation is too fresh and great for such a shrine to be as yet forgotten, but his most striking monument at Houghton is certainly the house which he built,—the record of his mind, of his ambition, of his tastes,—whose size and beauty completely overshadow and eclipse the very unassuming edifice whose humbler function it is to shelter his dust and ashes.

[8] "The house in Downing Street belonged to the Crown; King George the First gave it to Baron Bothmar, the Hanoverian Minister, for life. On his death, King George the Second offered it to Sir Robert Walpole, but he would only accept it for his office of First Lord of the Treasury, to which post he got it annexed for ever."—*Ædes Walpolianæ.*

The house at Houghton bears over the door the following inscription :—

"Robertvs Walpole
Has ÆDES
Anno 1722
Inchoavit
Anno 1735
Perfecit."

The great size of the fabric, the large proportion of underground brickwork, the amount of stone decoration on the outside, the perfect construction and finished workmanship of the numberless interior mahogany fittings, make it easy to see that these thirteen years must have been fully occupied in the progress and completion of this house. The shape of the building, with its four corners crowned with domes of stone, and the long extensive wings deploying from each side, is impressive; its two magnificent fronts (in spite of the absence from them of the exterior flights of steps) appear more beautiful at this day than at first; the summers and winters that have passed over them have gilded and enriched the grey tints of the stone, and the house combines happily with the dignified avenues whose trees have now assumed such noble dimensions.

The pictures were placed in the gallery in 1743 : Horace Walpole describes the process—"My lord is going to furnish and hang the picture gallery. Who could ever suspect any connection between painting and the wilds of Norfolk? There are several pictures undisposed of, besides numbers at Lord Walpole's, at the Exchequer, at Chelsea, at New Park. The Domenichino is delightful. My father is as much transported with it as I am. It is hung in the gallery, where are all his most capital pictures, and he himself thinks it beats all but the two Guidos. The gallery was illuminated (on some special occasion) : it is incredible what a magnificent appearance it made. There were sixty-four candles, which

showed all the pictures to great advantage." The collection included some of the choicest pictures of the Flemish, Dutch, Spanish, and various Italian Schools, and was so extensive as to furnish not only the gallery, but most of the principal apartments. Besides the well-known catalogue of Horace Walpole, in the *Ædes Walpolianæ*, a description of these pictures is given in the history of a tour made in Norfolk by William Gilpin, Prebendary of Salisbury,[9] just before the collection was removed from Houghton, and he adds in a subsequent chapter a list of them, with the prices which were given for them when they were sold. George, Earl of Orford, the grandson of Sir Robert, to enrich himself, and prop up his somewhat impaired fortunes, impoverished Norfolk to a lamentable extent, by the sale, in 1769, to the Empress Catherine of Russia of these fine pictures, which had adorned Houghton during the middle of the century. They were transferred to St. Petersburg, and now decorate the walls of a gallery in one of the imperial palaces.

To give a detailed list of these departed treasures of Norfolk would be too tantalizing; even archæology, skilled though it is in discovery, magic though its touch may be in unfolding, to the uninitiated eye, the statue hidden in the stone, or the gem of the leaden casket, cannot charm back into our presence that which has left no outward trace or indication; its province is stern fact; it deals with the revelations of the actual; and the impression therefore of the lovely forms of Guido, Rafaelle, and Murillo, of the supreme colouring of Titian and Veronese, of the startling force of Rembrandt, and the bounteous glory of Rubens, must fade and disappear, undetained. In spite of the uncivil remark before quoted, the wilds of Norfolk and their savage inhabitants can admire and assimilate art; and the pictures

[9] *Observations on Several Parts of the Counties of Cambridge, Norfolk, and Suffolk, Essex, and North Wales, in Two Tours in* 1769 *and* 1773, by William Gilpin.

which have been relegated to imperial care, and to a still bleaker climate, would have glowed under a brighter sunshine, and a no less warm appreciation, had they remained undisturbed.

The vacancies on the walls are now supplied with pictures of a very different calibre, although some few among them bear the immortal touch of the great masters. Such are, Vandyck's picture of the "Marriage of St. Catherine;" the "Holy Family" of Titian; a small "Holy Family" by Rafaelle; a full-length picture by Sir Joshua Reynolds; a Claude, and one or two landscapes and sea pieces.

Besides these are some interesting pictures of a different kind: the "Fortune-teller," by Opie; a family group by Hogarth; and a collection of portraits in the ground-floor parlours of the house.

The places of some of the departed pictures are said to have been refilled by Horace Walpole, who, however, in spite of his veneration for Sir Robert, took little practical interest in Houghton, the situation and surroundings of which were too entirely antagonistic to the habits and occupations of his life. Yet, when depreciating that situation, he might have reflected that Norfolk, although a county apart from any great centre of education, and remote from the busy world of books, of art, of cultivated men, had produced simultaneously in Sir Robert Walpole and his brother-in-law, men whose powers were universally recognized, and whose range of daily interest embraced more than half the world; and that he himself, with all his pride in his own fastidiousness, was actually born and reared in that desert, where the very squires seemed cut out of their own roast beef, and "only roughly hewn into the outlines of the human figure," and to visit which he makes as many preparations "as if he were going to Jamaica."

The picture of him at Houghton, with his two brothers, a charming trio of portraits the size of life, in the soft beautiful manner of Carriera Rosalba, gives justly the idea of the refined, satirical, dainty individual whose lively chronicle of the world in which he moved, has stamped his memory with a marked and peculiar distinction.

Perhaps Houghton and its locality could not enter much into the fancies of Horace Walpole; the happy faculty he possessed, and which makes his letters a source of unflagging entertainment, was rather that of perceiving and reproducing what was attractive and racy, than the more imaginative one of discovering the latent interest of the life around him.

Time has proved that the writing of letters, his favourite occupation, was a true instinct; which resulted in success, because it was a form of literary composition adapted to his character, tastes, and powers, enabling him to be heartless and inaccurate without criticism, and to place in brilliant mosaic every sort of various topic, without the unity and consecutiveness required in a more formal mode of authorship.

Some of his earlier letters were written from Houghton, and refer to Norfolk subjects; up to the time of his father's death he was in the habit of spending some part of each summer at Houghton; a series of twelve or fourteen written in the years 1742 and 1743, are dated from there, and two years later he revisited the place; after that time an interval of sixteen years elapsed, during which he was entirely absent from Norfolk. But there is one letter written from Houghton, long after the death of Sir Robert, but before the time when the coronet and estates devolved upon himself, which contains some touches of description that are interesting in connection with the place. This letter is dated during a visit which he paid to Norfolk on the

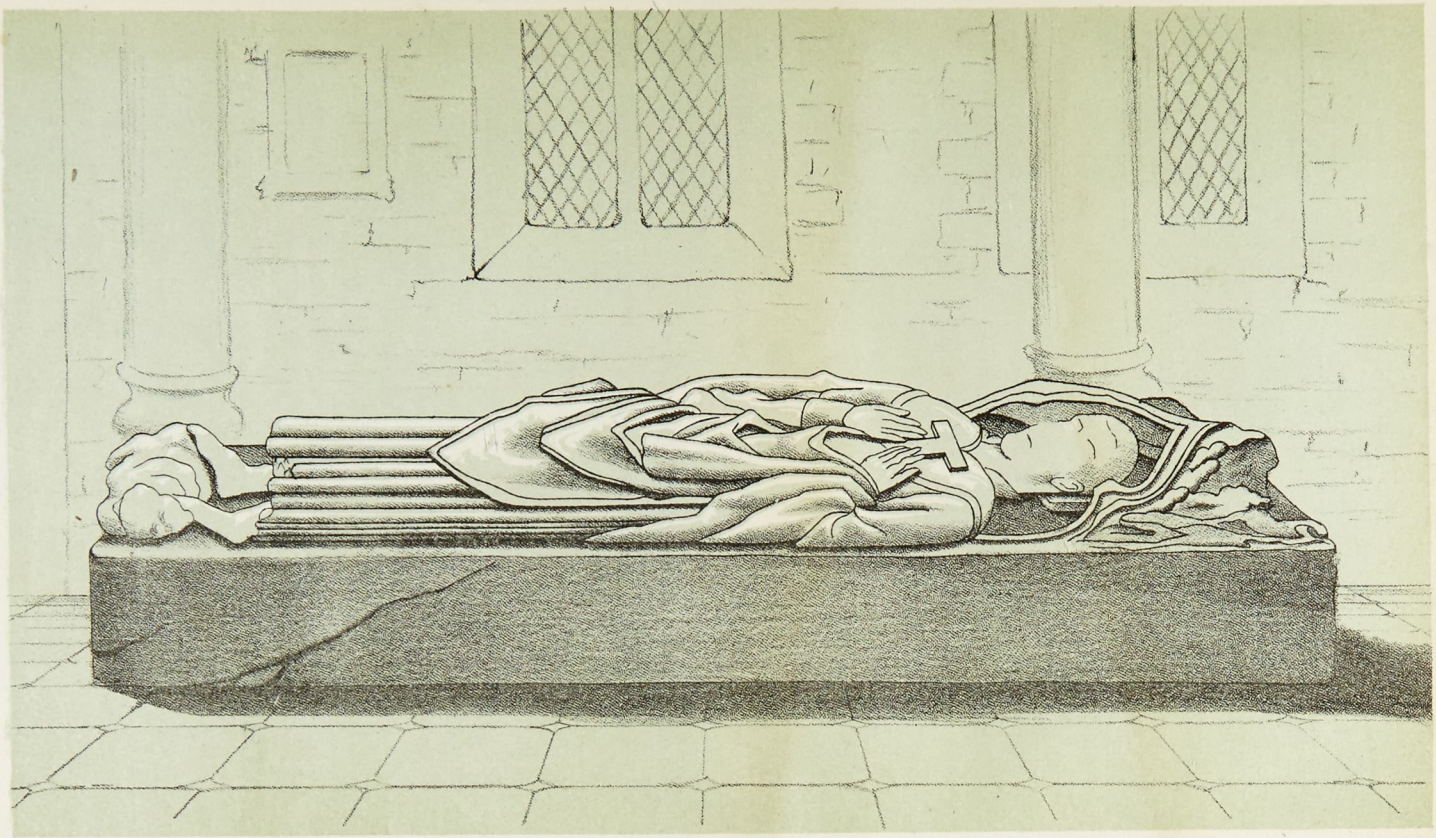
occasion of his election for Lynn, March, 1761;—a dreary month for such a visitor to encounter the unsheltered flats of Houghton, and that vast grand chilly interior which must have presented such a contrast to his own sham Gothic cottage at Twickenham.

"Here I am at Houghton! and alone! in this spot, where, (except two hours last month) I have not been in sixteen years. Think, what a crowd of reflections! No; Gray, and forty churchyards could not furnish so many; nay, I know one must feel them with greater indifference than I possess, to have patience to put them into verse. Here I am, probably for the last time of my life; though not for the last time; every clock that strikes tells me I am an hour nearer yonder church—that church, into which I have not yet had courage to enter, where lies that mother on whom I doated, and who doated on me. There are the two rival mistresses of Houghton, neither of whom ever wished to enjoy it—there too lies he who founded its greatness, to contribute to whose fall Europe was embroiled; there he sleeps in quiet and dignity. How wise a man at once, and how weak! For what has he built Houghton? For his grandson to annihilate, and his son to mourn over..... The servants wanted to lay me in the great apartment, but I have chosen to sit in my father's little dressing-room, and am now by his escrutoire. When I had drank tea, I strolled into the garden; they told me it was now called the *pleasure*-ground. In the days when all my soul was tuned to pleasure and vivacity, I hated Houghton and its solitude; yet, I loved this garden, as now, with many regrets, I love Houghton; Houghton, I know not what to call it, a monument of grandeur or ruin!"

The apartment which was occupied by Horace Walpole on the occurrence of this visit to Houghton is situated on the upper floor of the south wing, close to the colonnade which unites the wing with the main house; it opens out of a long and rather gloomy corridor; the bed-room is a low good-sized panelled room,—the panels lined with faded tapestry;—with one small square window; and through the bed-chamber is an inner room, the "little dressing-room" of Sir Robert Walpole, with a similar six-paned square

window. In this room the above letter was written to Mr. Montagu; the window looks straight out at the church, which is about three hundred yards distant—the staircase leading up to the clock-tower was just at Horace Walpole's right hand, outside the bed-room door. The room at this day, with its low window, with the adjacent church and the trees of the park full in view, with the recurring clang of the clock close by, seems haunted by the image of the frail figure sitting solitary in the midst of his melancholy grandeur, looking from the window at the church where his mother lay buried, and listening to the clock striking in the tower; and nothing appears more natural and irresistible than the tone of the thoughts and feelings poured out by him on such a spot in the letter to his friend. What a contrast to his wonted gossipping effusions; to the stir of London; to the trifles of Strawberry Hill! even he, to whom "small things always appeared great, and great things small," seems for once to have been arrested into some sense of reality, under the spell of the associations surrounding him. Horace Walpole lived for thirty-six years from the time this letter was written, and, after his funeral in 1797, the family vault was finally closed. For the last eighty years the stillness of death has been undisturbed in that underground chamber, except on one occasion. The coffins of the four earls (all placed there in the space of fifty-two years) are described by the visitor who then examined them; that of Sir Robert inscribed with all his honours; his own and that of Horace covered with black velvet, the others with mouldering crimson, fragments of which, with the coronets which were placed on the coffins, lay scattered on the floor.

The deaths of the two wives of Sir Robert Walpole took place curiously near together. The inscriptions are: Catherine, died August 1737, aged 55; Maria, March 1738, aged 36. A very narrow coffin, that of Catherine Walpole,



a daughter, who died of consumption, and was the first to occupy the new vault, made in 1722, completes the series.[1]

The older vault is under the chancel, and on the floor of the chancel are many interesting tombstones, forming almost a genealogy of the earlier members of the family. The church belonged to the priory of Cokesford, not far distant, once a flourishing convent, now only recalled to memory by the grey ruin whose skeleton walls are to be seen between Rudham and Houghton.

There is a monument in Houghton church of a prior of Cokesford, which is said to have been transferred to this church from the priory at the time of the Dissolution. This effigy, a recumbent figure the size of life, carved in gray marble, dressed in the Augustine garb, lying on a marble coffin,—a cross clasped to its breast, and crushing a demon beneath its feet,—lies in antique dignity above the bones of the Walpoles. Its personality must remain unknown, as the monument is nameless and without date: the possibility has been suggested that the individual commemorated may have been himself a Walpole; if so, his memorial adds that touch of sanctity to the family scene, which the other tombs in the church, superior as they are in human and historical interest, are perhaps less calculated to convey. But whether related or not, the mediæval priest and the modern statesman now rest in quiet partnership; the confidence expressed by the latter (contained in the inscription on the foundation stone of the house which he built) that he would never be forgotten by his descendants,—the wish that his children's children, after he should be "set free," should continue to possess that house,—have hitherto been justified and fulfilled; but the earthly honours and powers which were invested in the lord of the manor, as in the

[1] Sir Robert Walpole's other daughter, Mary, married Viscount Malpas, son of the Earl of Cholmondeley: from her descends, in direct line, the present owner of Houghton.

abbot of the monastery, have alike slipped from their grasp, and have left these very diverse companions, who "could carry nothing away" of the goods of this world, in the possession only of the one inalienable and the best of gifts, that of their own entity,—acknowledged and described for them in the appropriate couplet of Pope—

> "Let lands and houses have what lords they will,
> Let Us be fixed, and our own Masters still!"