

BOLINGBROKE HOUSE—A STATESMAN'S HOME.

Read in the Cedar Room in Bolingbroke House, May 13th, 1911.

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BOLINGBROKE HOUSE is noted as the home of the great Tory statesman, St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke, and Minister to Queen Anne. From Viscount Grandison, who died in 1630, the manors of Battersea and Wandsworth devolved on his great-nephew, and were by him granted to his uncle, Walter St. John, and remained in this family till purchased in 1763 by Lord Spencer, lord of the manor.

We can somewhat picture the home of the St. Johns, close to the parish church, a mansion which looked down on the bright river scene, where the brown-sailed barges and pleasure crafts floated calmly along the silvery Thames.

The spacious house once contained twenty rooms on a floor, and the Cedar room, wainscotted in cedar, still stands famous as the meeting place of the elder Pitt, Pope and Swift, with Bolingbroke, their host. By a passage approach to this room are seen traces of the brush of Verrio and Laguerre. The greater part of the house was pulled down about 1780, and an engraving of later date represents part of the house adjoining to and absorbed by the premises of a large flour mill; this print and others of the river and Battersea Church are contained in the fine interleaved copy of Manning and Bray's Surrey, in the British Museum, a work replete

with pencil and colour sketches of buildings in the county. In volume four of the "Victoria" history of Surrey are views of the panelled room, where Pope is said to have written his "Essay on Man," and of the finely carved staircase.

Our old houses are famed for their panelled interiors, and the recent removal of panelling from the Treaty House, Uxbridge, the Reindeer Inn at Banbury, and elsewhere, cannot be too greatly condemned, especially as these choice examples of woodwork have been sold and taken to America!

Viscount St. John, born at Battersea in 1678, was educated at Eton and Christchurch, Oxford, and became, at the age of 32, Secretary of State for War, in which position his ability was shown in quickness, penetration and vivacity.

A complex character was that of Henry St. John. The love of pleasure in early life obtained so much ascendancy as to hinder him from using his talents for the best, and a critic of that time wrote: "Lord Bolingbroke had early made himself master of books and men; he ran through a variety of scenes in an eccentric manner." Later, the same writer remarks that "the gay statesman has changed into a philosopher equal to any of the sages of antiquity." He held office during the period of Marlborough's brilliant victories. On the death of Queen Anne his career changed. He became neglected and left England, living in France on a small estate he bought near Orleans. Here he was visited by Voltaire, who speaks of his "politeness, learning, and complete command of French." On his return to England he was partly restored to favour by George the

First, entered public life again, and wrote against the Opposition government, and Walpole, the Premier.

The intervals of his return from abroad were spent in his Battersea home in reading and writing. One of his numerous essays, "Reflexions in Exile," was written in 1716, and his beauty of style and matter was eulogised by Lord Chesterfield, who said, "Until he read Bolingbroke, he did not know the extent and power of the English language." The "Examiner," first set up in 1710, counted Bolingbroke, Prior, and Swift as its contributors. In the "Craftsman," an organ of political invective and party warfare, Henry St. John's mortified ambition urged him to write essays against Sir Robert Walpole, and it is with a sense of disappointment that powers of so high an order betrayed him into contradiction and violent action. Under his influence, the newspaper stamp duty took place, which attempted to curtail the liberty of the Press, a measure that raised the opposition of the printers, and unpopularity against its promoter. The brilliant talents of Bolingbroke—genius, learning and wit—were often obscured by want of prudence, integrity and foresight.

The genealogy of the St. Johns is printed in most of the Surrey histories; some engraved likenesses exist; also a fine oil portrait by Rigaud, preserved in the National Portrait Gallery.

The statesman's second wife was the widow of the Marquis de Villette, a niece of Madame de Maintenon. An elegant monument by Roubillac in Battersea Church commemorates this lady; and there is also a medallion bust by the same artist of Viscount Bolingbroke, with an inscription which is given in the preceding paper.