

reach of all who are interested in the subject—and what patriotic heart is not? Through the courtesy of the publishers we are enabled to place before our readers specimens of some of the handsome engravings which grace these volumes, and to give brief sketches of some of the old castles, halls, and manors which are described. As, however, there are over thirty of these described in detail in these 760 pages, it will be evident that we can only cursorily treat the subject. For more adequate and satisfactory treatment we must refer our readers to the volumes, which will be found a perfect treasury of all that pertains to the ancient families and ancient historic houses of England. The first of these stately homes that we shall briefly describe is

BELVOIR CASTLE.

One of the most majestic in character, commanding in situation, and picturesque in its surroundings, is this grand old seat of his Grace the Duke of Rutland. Situated near the junction of the three counties of Leicester, Nottingham, and Lincoln, it commands from its massy tower a panorama of sixty miles in diameter, and is itself the most conspicuous object in all that sweep of country. In its immediate neighbourhood is the famous "Vale of Belvoir," the theme of poet and delight of painter. A peculiarity of Belvoir is that it has no enclosed park—fences, lodges, gates are unknown. For miles on every side, and up to the very door of the castle, the public may ride or drive or wander on foot at will, without let or hindrance.

The history of the castle dates back to the Norman Conquest. William the Conqueror gave to his faithful standard-bearer, Robert Belviler, this fair estate, with four score manors beside. A long line of Lords of Belvoir reared its grim fortress, and enlarged its stately halls, and held them for the King and against his foes during the Lancastrian and Parliamentary wars. In 1645 King Charles and Prince Rupert themselves directed its defence. But the cannon of Cromwell battered its walls, and his stern Ironsides took it by storm. Often since has royalty been its guest, and its stately halls have given loyal welcome to the sovereigns of the realm, including—the noblest of her line—Her Majesty the Queen.

One would scarcely expect, to look at the grim fortress castle from without, that it possessed such luxurious appointments