

CHAPTER II.

Offspring of Edward III.—Richard II. deposed by Henry of Lancaster, who usurps the throne.—Superior title of the Earl of March.—The Earl of Cambridge conspires to dethrone Henry V.—He is seized and executed for high treason.—Rivalry of the Houses of York and Lancaster.—The honours of the race of Clarence and of York centre in Richard Plantagenet, heir of the attainted Cambridge.—His childhood, wardship, character and high reputation.—Unpopularity of Henry VI.—His loss of reason.—Duke of York is made Protector.—Birth of Edward Prince of Wales.—Hostility of Queen Margaret towards the Duke of York.—He asserts his title to the throne.—His claims admitted by parliament.—Indignation of Margaret.—Battle of Wakefield.—The Duke of York is slain.—Edward, his eldest son, proclaimed king.

BEFORE entering on the more particular and personal history of Richard, Duke of Gloucester, in order that the nature of his political position may be clearly understood, it will be necessary briefly to review the state of public affairs up to the birth of that prince; so far, at least, as is requisite to show what was the situation of his parents, both as regards their connection with the throne, and likewise with that faction of which they were the acknowledged head. The offspring of Edward III. and Philippa of Hainault, who commenced their reign in the year 1327, consisted of seven sons and five daughters.* Of these the eldest, Edward the Black Prince, died of consumption shortly before his father, so that the crown, in 1377, devolved on a minor, Richard II., his only surviving child.

That prince, weak, irascible and self-willed, though endowed with amiable and affectionate qualities, was deposed in 1399 by his cousin Henry of Bolingbroke, heir to John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, the fourth son of Edward III. Parliament, however, had previously nominated as successor to Richard II., who had early been united to Ann of Bohemia, but without issue, Roger Mortimer, Earl of March,† the grandson of Lionel, Duke of Clarence, elder brother to John of Gaunt, and the legitimate heir to the throne; Prince William, King Edward's second son, having died young.‡

The House of Lancaster being powerful, wealthy and highly popular, this branch of King Edward's family retained possession of the usurped sceptre, and transferred it to their lineal successors for three consecutive reigns; viz., that of Henry IV., who forcibly seized it, his son Henry V. and Henry VI. his grandson; the three sovereigns who compose that branch of the Plantagenet dynasty, which, in our regnal annals, is denominated the Lancastrian.

But their sway, though uninterrupted for upwards of half a century, was neither peaceful nor altogether uncontested. Notwithstanding the alleged abdication of Richard II., and the fact that Parliament ratified§ the usurpation of Henry IV.,|| the claims of the descendants of Lionel, Duke of Clarence were considered, at Richard's decease, indisputable by the laws of

* See Appendix D.

† Rot. Parl., vol. v. p. 484.

‡ In the Cott. MSS. there is preserved a very interesting cotemporaneous account of the funeral of this young prince, who was born at Hatfield in 1336, and dying 3d March, was buried at York, 9 Edw. III.—Cott. MSS., Nero C. viii. fol. 213.

§ Rot. Parl., vol. iii. p. 416.

|| Ibid., p. 424.

inheritance. This Prince Lionel left an only child, Philippa, married to Edward Mortimer, Earl of March, in whose son Roger centred the above-named claims.* This son, however, dying before the deposed monarch, his heir, a child seven years of age, with an infant brother, were imprisoned for many years at Windsor Castle,† and their wardship bestowed on the Prince of Wales, afterwards Henry V., that their rich possessions and rival claims to the crown might ensure from the heir apparent continued and safe custody. Unusual as is such a result in such cases of conflicting interests, a chivalric and romantic friendship sprang up between the prince and his imprisoned cousins; so that, upon his accession to the throne, Henry V. experienced no opposition from Edmund Mortimer,‡ but numbered him amongst his most devoted followers.

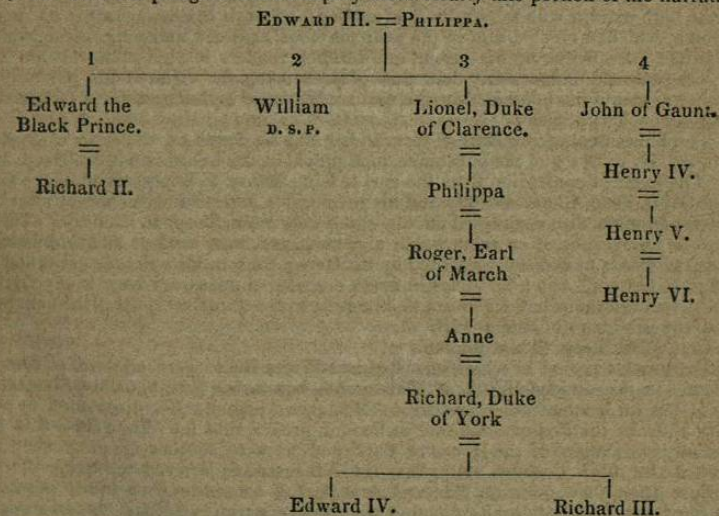
Thus stood matters during the usurping reign of Henry IV. as regards the four eldest branches of King Edward's race.§ The fifth son of that monarch was Edmund Langley, Duke of York, who married Isabel, daughter and co-heiress of Peter, King of Castile and Leon.|| John of Gaunt having espoused her sister, a double connection by birth and by marriage united, for a brief period, the houses of York and Lancaster; but this alliance produced a mere temporary submission to the usurpation of the latter; for the Duke of York's second son,¶ the Earl of Cambridge, espousing the Lady Ann Mortimer, sister to the above-named Earl of March, and granddaughter of Philippa of Clarence, that branch speedily and with great energy advocated the rights of primogeniture, which had been tacitly abandoned by Edward Mortimer, the rightful heir. This nobleman was childless,** so that no personal ambition stimulated opposition to his early friend and former guardian; and the other

* Sandford, book iii. ch. xii.

† Hume, vol. iv. p. 62.

‡ Kennet, vol. i. p. 315.

§ The annexed pedigree will exemplify more clearly this portion of the narrative.



¶ Testamenta Vetusta, vol. i. p. 134.

¶ Richard of York, surnamed of Coningsburgh, from the place of his birth, and created Earl of Cambridge by Henry V. shortly after his accession to the throne.—Parl. Ann. 11 Hen. V.

** Sir Francis Biondi's Hist. of the Civill Warres, vol. i. p. 114.

male branches of the House of March having gradually fallen victims to zeal for their race, or dying without issue, the lineal rights of their ancestor, Lionel of Clarence, became vested, after Edmund Mortimer's decease, in Richard Plantagenet, the only son of the Lady Ann Mortimer and the Earl of Cambridge.* Now this latter prince was not of a temperament quietly to abandon his child's just claims; consequently, in the third year of King Henry's reign, upon the eve of that monarch's departure on an expedition into France, he joined in a conspiracy with some leading nobles, the Lord Treasurer Scroop, and Sir Thomas Grey, who were favourable to his cause, to depose Henry V.,† and restore the lawful heir to the throne in the person of the above-named Edmund Mortimer, Philippa's grandson, and his own brother by marriage. Being, however, betrayed by the Earl of March, to whom he had disclosed this conspiracy, the ostensible design of which was to place him on the throne of his ancestors, but doubtless with the ultimate view of his son's succession, he was seized, tried, and condemned on his own confession,‡ and beheaded with the other conspirators at Southampton§ in the year 1415, and third of Henry V.

The untimely death of this prince, who was much and deservedly beloved, induced in his race a particular and personal cause of hatred against the line of Lancaster; and the two branches of Clarence and York being united by marriage and influenced by mutual feelings of indignation from injuries inflicted by the reigning family, they henceforth became leagued in one common cause of enmity against them; whence the unceasing and exterminating warfare that characterized the period in which their several claims were so fiercely contested under the well-known application of the Wars of the Roses.¶ By the

* Testamenta Vetusta, vol. ii. p. 110.

† Some of the early chronicles ascribe this conspiracy to Charles VI. of France, stating that he offered a million of gold for the betrayal or murder of King Henry; but the high esteem with which Richard of Coningsburgh was regarded by his royal kinsman, who had created him in the year previous Earl of Cambridge, a title which had before been borne by his father and brother, renders it highly improbable that any less powerful inducement than that of preserving the right of his posterity to the crown, would have induced in the earl so desperate and ungrateful a scheme.—*Sandford*, book v. p. 366.

‡ The indictment of the Earl of Cambridge may be found on the Rolls of Parliament, vol. iv. p. 64; and the substance, in English, in the Lansdown MSS. No. 1. art. 27. The letter of confession from the earl to King Henry V. is preserved in the Cottonian MSS. Vesp. C. xiv. fol. 39; and his memorable letter, suing for mercy after his condemnation, is also contained in the same collection, Vesp. F. iii. fol. 7. These letters, as autographs of so remarkable a person, are most curious and interesting; but as the whole have been published by Sir Henry Ellis, in his valuable collection of "Original Letters," vol. i. 2d series, it is not considered necessary here to give more than correct reference to the genuine documents, which so minutely detail the unhappy end of the grandsire of Richard III.

§ Cott. MSS. Vesp. C. xiv. fol. 39.

¶ The precise period at which the Red and White Roses were adopted as hostile emblems in the divided House of Plantagenet, has never been satisfactorily ascertained; but an ancient cotemporaneous MS. (see Appendix E), discovered by Sir Henry Ellis in the Bodleian Library at Oxford, proves that the White Rose was an hereditary cognizance of the House of York, and borne as such by the duke when he inherited the title. Camden states that the Lancastrians derived the badge of the Red Rose from their ancestor Edmund, first Earl of Lancaster, "on whose person," says Sandford, "was originally founded the great contention betwixt the two royal houses of Lancaster and York." And in a curious article, entitled "Impresses," Camden, in his Remains, p. 451, asserts, that "Edmund Crouch-backe, second son of Henry III., used a Red Rose, wherewith his tomb at Westminster is adorned." Also, that "John of Gaunt, fifth Duke of Lancaster, took a Red Rose to his device, as it were by right of his first wife, the heiress of Lancaster, grandchild to the above-named

demise of Edward,* eldest son of Edmund Langley, Duke of York, who was slain at the battle of Agincourt, and left no issue, the infant heir of the recently executed Earl of Cambridge became the head of this family, and the inheritor of his uncle's fortune and honours;† but in consequence of his father's rebellion and subsequent attainder, these latter were withheld from him.

At the death of the Duke of York, in 1415, a few months after the execution of the Earl of Cambridge, Richard Plantagenet was only three years of age; nevertheless the suspicions induced by the earl's conspiracy, and the jealousy resulting from the justness of his son's maternal claims on the crown, led to his being immediately apprehended and committed to the Tower, under the custody and vigilant care of Robert Waterton,‡ brother to King Henry's favourite attendant: there he continued closely imprisoned for a considerable time, associated with the celebrated Duke of Orleans and other noble prisoners who had been captured at the battle of Agincourt, in which his uncle had so recently fallen.

So long as Henry V. survived, and for some time after the accession of his son Henry VI., the young Plantagenet experienced all the evil effects of his father's unfortunate rebellion and attainder. His mother dying during his infancy was spared a participation in the misery that afterwards befell her husband and her child.§ On the decease, however, of her only surviving brother, the before-named Earl of March, without issue, her orphan son, already heir to the vast possessions of the House of York, succeeded also to the immense wealth and hereditary honours of this his maternal uncle,|| including the earldoms of March and Ulster, and the lordships of Wigmore, Clare, Trim and Connaught: he consequently united thus, in his own person, the representation of King Edward's third and fifth sons, and by virtue of direct heirship from the former, became the lineal inheritor of the sovereignty of England.¶

Edmund Crouch-backe;" and that "Edmund of Langley, Duke of York, his younger brother, adopted as his emblem the White Rose."

* Edward Plantagenet was created Earl of Rutland during his father's lifetime, 13 Richard II.; but on his decease, in 1402, succeeded him in his titles and estates as Duke of York and Earl of Cambridge. This latter dignity, as stated in a former note, was granted to his younger brother, Richard of Coningsburgh, in the second year of King Henry V., who held it at the time when he was executed at Southampton for conspiracy against the king.—*Sandford*, book v. p. 363.

† Nichol's Royal Wills, p. 222.

‡ A petition from Waterton, praying for payment of the 150*l.* per annum, awarded to him for the board and safe keeping of the infant prince, is published in Rymer's *Fœdera*, vol. ix. p. 317. See Appendix F.

§ The Lady Anne Mortimer died young, and left two children by the Earl of Cambridge; a son, the above-named Richard Plantagenet, and a daughter, Isabel. From the tender years of her brother at his father's death, and from the circumstance of the Earl of Cambridge having married again some time before his execution, the lady Isabel was, in all probability, the eldest. She was afterwards united to Henry Bourchier, Earl of Essex and Viscount Bourchier, by whom she had a numerous family. The second wife of Richard, Earl of Cambridge, was Maud, the daughter of Thomas Lord Clifford, by whom he had no issue. She subsequently espoused John Lord Latimer, and died about the 25th of Hen. VI.—*Sandford*, book v. p. 367.

|| On the accession of Henry VI., the Earl of March was appointed lord-lieutenant of Ireland, and died in that country, 3d Henry VI., 1424.—*Sloane MSS.*, 17.6. Of this ill-fated nobleman we find the following notice in Biondi, book iv. p. 25:—"At this time (Henry VI. 1424), Edmund Mortimer, Earl of March, formerly deprived of his liberty, died at Trimmes, in Ireland, wherupon his just and lawful pretences fell upon Richard Plantagenet, sonne of that Richard, Earl of Cambridge, who, by the commandment of Henry V., was beheaded at Southampton in 1415."—See also *Sandford*, book iii. p. 225.

¶ *Sandford*, book v. p. 369.

It was not, however, until the fourth year of the reign of Henry VI. that the young Richard Plantagenet, then about thirteen years of age,* after being knighted with his youthful monarch, was fully restored to his twofold rank,† as Duke of York and Earl of Cambridge and Rutland on the paternal side, and Earl of March and Ulster in right of his mother. The reigning family appeared at this time too firmly seated on the throne to dread a revival of those claims which had now remained in abeyance for three generations, and in the mean time had been confirmed to themselves by repeated acts of the legislature. Great care was also taken that, from his earliest childhood, the heir of the House of York should be intimately associated with, and carefully guarded by, leaders of the Lancastrian party, his wardship‡ having been assigned to Ralph, Earl of Westmoreland, who had married the princess Joane Beaufort, daughter of John of Gaunt and sister to Henry Bolingbroke, the founder of the Lancastrian dynasty. The evil fortunes which so early overwhelmed the family of the Earl of Cambridge appear to have been productive of singular benefit to his infant son and successor in tempering his character and conduct; for all the writers of that period agree in admitting that he was a prince of considerable ability, and one of the most upright and excellent characters that adorned the age.

Courageous and intrepid, humane and beneficent, he was remarkable for his heroism in the field of battle, and for his temperate and conciliating conduct in political affairs;§ and this, too, under circumstances of strong excitement and peculiar temptation.|| These estimable qualities, and the factious spirit which early agitated the court of Henry VI. (arising from the struggle for power between Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester and Cardinal Beaufort), accelerated the advancement of this promising young prince, and laid the foundation for that popularity which eventually restored the diadem to the House of York in the person of his eldest son, King Edward IV. Upon the departure of Henry VI. into France, to be crowned monarch of that realm, he nominated the Duke of York to be constable of England;¶ and after the demise of the king's uncle, the Duke of Bedford, in 1435, Richard was appointed, at the early age of seventeen,** to the regency of France.†† Recalled from this arduous station by the machinations of the opposite party, the Duke of York became so distinguished for his military prowess and daring achievements, that, in 1440, he was again appointed

* Richard Plantagenet being three years of age when the Duke of York was slain at Agincourt, 25th October, 1415, he must have been in his twelfth year when he succeeded to the honours of the House of March on the demise of his uncle (3d of Hen. VI. 1424), and aged about thirteen when fully restored to his dignity as Duke of York in the Parliament assembled at Leicester in the fourth year of that monarch's reign.—*Sandford*, book v. p. 365.

† Vincent on Brooke, p. 621.

‡ *Fœdera*, vol. x. p. 358.

§ Hume, vol. iv. p. 168.

|| Sharon Turner, vol. iii. p. 174.

¶ Rot. Parl. Hen. VI. p. 1. m. 7.

** It was in allusion to this high appointment, that his great political antagonist, Edmund, Duke of Somerset, exclaimed, at a subsequent period, "that if York had not learned to play the king by his regency in France, he had never forgot to obey as a subject in England."—*Echard*, vol. i. p. 214.

†† This most important command bestowed on one so young, affords a remarkable proof at how very early an age after Richard's restoration to his rank and title his dormant claims on the crown were tacitly admitted. "Bedford, the king's uncle, being dead," says Biondi, "a new choice was made of who should succeed him as regent of France. Of two that pretended thereunto, the Duke of York bore away the bell; whereat the Duke of Somerset was scandalized, who, being the king's cousin, thought to have been preferred before him, but the council was of another opinion: York's true pretence unto the crown, though at that time not spoken of, was perhaps the cause why they would not discontent him."—*Biondi*, vol. ii. p. 96.

"lieutenant-general and governor-general" of that kingdom;* but being superseded at the expiration of five years, really through the ambition of John, Duke of Somerset, but under pretence of suppressing a formidable insurrection in Ireland,† he displayed on that occasion such strong judgment and such eminent self-command, that it revived in full force the recollection of those regal claims which were possessed by so noble a character,‡ and considerably strengthened his title to that throne which was, ere long, to be openly contested.

The Duke of York himself gave no encouragement for many years to cabals or conspiracies in his favour. The unhappy fate of his parent had been an awful and a severe lesson to him in childhood. The earlier years of his life had been devoted to warlike exploits in other lands, and as a natural result he was but little connected with political schemes at home. He was loyal to the reigning monarch, and submissive to the laws of the realm. He ruled justly and wisely as the vicegerent of that sovereign, and cheerfully obeyed his mandate when officially recalled from the honourable appointments§ before mentioned; but a combination of events in after years (which it is unnecessary here to do more than very briefly advert to) forced him eventually to take a decisive part in the domestic struggles that agitated his country, and finally, in self-defence, to enforce those pretensions to the crown which he clearly inherited from Edward III. through the royal descent of his illustrious mother.

From the time that Henry VI. ascended the throne, as an infant but eight months old, this country was little less than one continued scene of disorder and contention. Naturally weak and timid, possessed of every mild and endearing virtue that could attach the affections in private life, but deficient in vigour of mind, in judgment, and those nobler qualities which dignify the character, and are, indeed, essential in the ruler of a great and powerful nation, this amiable sovereign became from his earliest childhood the victim of ambitious guardians,|| and continued through life the tool of designing and selfish ministers. The measure of his misfortunes was completed by his marriage with Margaret of Anjou,¶ a princess of singular beauty and ac-

* Minutes of Priv. Coun. 19 Hen. VI. 1440.

† Stow asserts that "in 1449 there began a new rebellion in Ireland; but Richard, Duke of York, being sent thither to appease the same, so assuaged the fury of the wild and savage people there, that he won such favour among them as could never be separated from him." It has been also observed by Sir Henry Ellis, that "in justice to the Duke of York it must be stated, that the acts which were passed in the Parliament of Ireland under his administration reflect the greatest credit on his memory."—*Ellis*, *Original Letters*, vol. i. p. 107.

‡ *Sandford*, book v. p. 371.

§ Sir Harris Nicolas, in his preface to "Minutes of the Privy Council," 15 Hen. VI. 1437 (p. xi.), states that "on the 7th of April the council ordered letters to be written to the Duke of York, whose command as lieutenant of France had expired, and who was unwilling to retain that office, thanking him for his services and requesting him to continue in France until his successor arrived." The same learned writer also adds (p. xiv.), "there seems to have been considerable difficulty in finding a successor for the Duke of York, &c. &c. After much consideration, Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, accepted it, on condition that he had the same powers granted as his predecessor," (pp. xi. xiv.) A most convincing proof of the trust reposed in him, and of the confidence entertained in his loyalty and high principles.

|| Cont. Croyland Chron., p. 52.

¶ This princess was the daughter of Reyner, Duke of Anjou, titular king of Jerusalem, Sicily, Arago, Valence, &c., and Isabel his wife, third daughter of Charles, Duke of Lorraine. She was united to Henry VI. at Southwick in Hants, on the 22d of April, 1445, and on the 30th of May following was crowned at Westminster.—*Sandford*, book iv. p. 290.

complishments, but of so masculine a spirit and so unyielding a disposition, that she increased the disaffection which was felt towards her royal consort, and by her violent temper and inordinate ambition fed the discontent that arose from the misgovernment of those evil counsellors who influenced the simple-minded king in his unpopular measures. The illness of Henry VI. in the thirtieth year of his reign* (about thirteen years after his union with Queen Margaret), ending in imbecility of the most distressing kind,† openly rekindled the long-smothered contentions between the rival branches of the House of Plantagenet; and the Duke of York, by the death of different members of the reigning family without issue, having become first prince of the blood, and, consequently, next in order of succession to the throne, apart from his dormant maternal claims, was unanimously elected by Parliament‡ “protector and defender of the realm,” and in April, 1454, invested with all the state and importance attached to heir presumptive of the crown.

The birth of an heir apparent, Edward, Prince of Wales, at this critical juncture, and under circumstances of painful suspicion as regards his legitimacy, increased rather than diminished the strength of the opposing party.§ The distraction which had so long desolated the kingdom was attributed, and most justly, to the long minority|| of the reigning sovereign and the factious spirit of his regency; the prospect, therefore, of similar evils recurring in the person of his infant son, born so many years after his marriage, and when the king, by reason of his infirmities, was in a manner dead to his subjects, aroused a feeling of discontent in the supporters of the rights of primogeniture, that was daily fostered by the imperious conduct of the queen-mother and the obnoxious measures of her ministers.

A curious and striking proof of the general feeling relative to the claims of the Duke of York, and of the favourable manner with which they were advocated by the people at large, is evinced by some cotemporaneous rhythmical lines, quoted by Augustine Vincent,¶ the learned antiquary, from an ancient roll in his possession;** which verses attest the pains that were taken to promulgate the lineage of York at the time he was advanced to the protectorate,†† by means of itinerant minstrels, the popular historians of the day.‡‡

* W. Wyr., p. 477.

† The melancholy state of the unfortunate monarch is most affectingly described in the parliamentary record which perpetuates the event. Certain nobles, accompanied by the Bishop of Chester, were deputed by the House of Lords to ascertain by a personal interview the exact condition of the afflicted king, and to endeavour to learn his pleasure on public matters of importance, “to the which matters nor to any of them they could get no answer nor sign; for no prayer nor desire, lamentable cheer nor expectation, nor any thing that they or any of them could do or say, to their great sorrow and discomfort. After dinner they came to the king’s highness in the same place where they were before, and there they moved and stirred him by all the ways and means that they could think to have answer of the said matter . . . but they could have no answer, word, nor sign, and therefore with sorrowful hearts came their way.”—*Rot. Parl.*, vol. v. p. 241.

‡ *Rot. Parl.*, vol. v. p. 242.

§ Sharon Turner, vol. iii. p. 192.

¶ Vincent’s Catalogue of the Nobility, p. 622.

** See Appendix G.

†† The composition in question was written by an Augustine friar of the monastery of Clare in Suffolk, the manorial rights of which were the lineal inheritance of the now popular Duke of York.—*Weever’s Funeral Monuments*, p. 734.

‡‡ It was chiefly by means of these metrical traditions that the people of England, before the introduction of printing, became acquainted with the leading events of their national history; and through the medium of wandering musicians, the chroniclers

The power of the Duke of York* thus gaining ground, notwithstanding the birth of an heir apparent, and the jealous indignation of Margaret of Anjou being roused past all control, an open rupture was the result; and for a space of ten years the animosity, the hatred, the spirit of vengeance, which characterized the two parties, can only be estimated by perusing the minute and particular accounts written by cotemporary annalists† of the principal battles which marked, and may truly be said to have disgraced, this most sanguinary age.‡ Of these no farther notice is here required than the simple statement, that at the expiration of that period (October 1460) the Duke of York, being irritated to extremity by the political and personal opposition of the queen, and goaded by his incensed party to revenge the insults which had been repeatedly offered to them by the House of Somerset, who considered themselves next to the infant Prince of Wales in heirship to Henry VI.§ at

of those early days, who chaunted their rude verses in the several houses of entertainment which they frequented in their rambles, much interesting matter was transmitted from generation to generation, and thus preserved for the benefit of more enlightened times.

* “It is not unworthy of observation, that the rebels of this period expected increased popularity from connecting their insurrections with any name appertaining to the House of York.” Jack Sharpe, for example, was “of Wigmore’s lands in Wales,” and Jack Cade was “a Mortimer,” cousin to the Duke of York (as he termed himself at least); and this rebel’s ejaculation, “Now is Mortimer lord of this city,” when on passing the famed London Stone he struck it with his sword, is familiar to all acquainted with the history of this period.—*Ellis’s Original Letters*, 2d series, p. 113.

† Whethamstede, pp. 353—481; also W. Wyr., p. 484.

‡ Amongst the Harleian MSS. (see No. 901, art. 5) has been preserved an original document, containing the names of the kings, princes and nobles slain during these desperate battles between the houses of York and Lancaster, when they so fiercely contested for the crown. In the brief period of fifty-four years it numbers on the list 3 kings, 12 dukes, 1 marquis, 17 earls, 1 viscount and 24 barons.

§ The connection of the House of Somerset with the reigning family was as follows:—John of Gaunt was thrice married. By his first wife, the Lady Blanch, heiress of the Duke of Lancaster (and in right of whom he assumed that title), he had one only son, Henry of Bolingbroke, afterwards Henry IV. By his second wife, the Princess Constance, co-heiress of the King of Castile and Leon, he had no male issue. But during her lifetime he had four sons and one daughter by Dame Katherine Swynford, widow of Sir Otes Swynford, formerly a knight in his service, and whom he eventually espoused after the decease of the Princess Constance.

By an act passed in the reign of Richard II. (*Rot. Parl.*, vol. iii. p. 343), these children, surnamed De Beaufort, were, on the duke’s marriage with their mother, legitimized by Parliament, and the eldest son was forthwith created Earl of Somerset; but though thus permitted to share with the lawful offspring of John of Gaunt the enormous wealth and vast possessions of their common parent, yet the deed itself was not at that time considered as entitling them to succession to the crown; but, on the contrary, as excepting them by special reservation (*Excerpt. Hist.*, p. 153) from all regal immunities that might accrue to the descendants of their illustrious parent. From this important point originated the enmity and personal jealousy that subsisted between the Duke of York and the above-named family of Somerset, the latter acting on all occasions, as indeed they considered themselves to be the representatives of the House of Lancaster on failure of direct male issue; and the former, as heir presumptive, and entitled to the crown by lineal and unimpeachable descent, disdaining the claims of the De Beauforts, springing as they did from a corrupted and illegitimate source.

The high position, however, which the Earl of Somerset occupied at the court of Henry VI. is evinced by his being styled, in a letter from the privy council to the inhabitants of Bordeaux when appointed lieutenant-general of France, as “a powerful and distinguished prince of the king’s blood and lineage.” (*Minutes of Priv. Coun.*, civ.); by his being created Duke of Somerset and Lord of Kendale, with precedence above the Duke of Norfolk; and by his being allowed to inspect the register of the king’s lands, that he might select those which he thought proper.—*Ibid.*, cx.

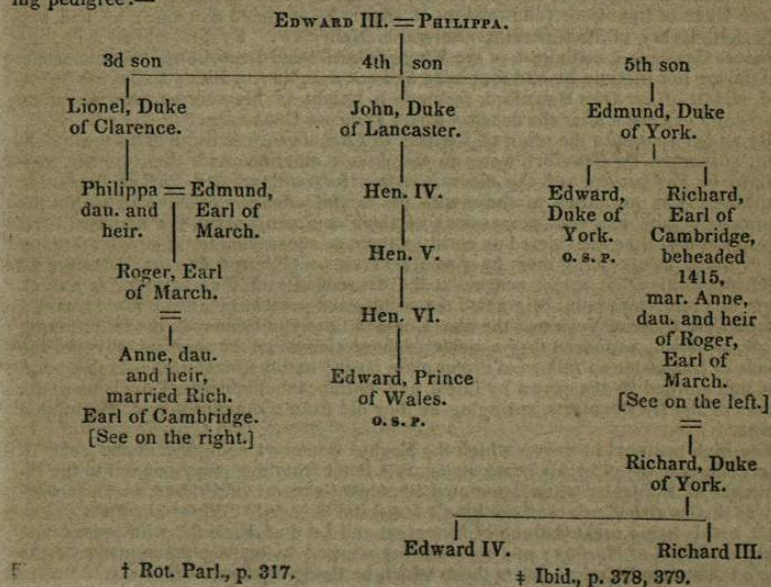
length publicly appealed to Parliament for a recognition of his title to the throne* as the descendant of Lionel, Duke of Clarence.

His claims having been presented in legal form to the lord chancellor, were by him submitted to the twelve judges, and, after being argued at considerable length by the great law officers of the crown, they were dispassionately considered, and at last finally recognized by the House of Lords.† Reluctant to depose the well-meaning but simple-minded monarch, who had recovered his reason indeed, but continued weak in health, and yet more infirm of purpose, an act was passed by the more moderate of each party to the effect that Henry VI. should retain the sceptre for the remainder of his life, but that succession to the throne should devolve, on his decease, to the Duke of York and his heirs.‡

The opposing statutes of Henry of Bolingbroke were repealed, a new act

This nobleman died in 1444, (*Collins's Peerage*, i. 197.) and was succeeded in his titles and station by his brother Edmund, whose haughty and imperious manners rendered him generally unpopular; while the ascendancy which he obtained over King Henry and Queen Margaret caused great indignation amongst the ancient nobles of the land, which increased to open hostility, when, through the influence of his royal mistress, the obnoxious favourite was chosen as chief minister of the crown. To this source may unhesitatingly be ascribed the origin of the Duke of York's rebellious conduct towards his sovereign (*Paston Letters*, vol. i. p. 65), which was first evinced in a petition urging the arrest of Somerset, and calling on the king to institute inquiry into his conduct, (*Rot. Parl.* v. p. 316.) and which was followed by articles of impeachment exhibited against him as chief minister in 1451 (*Cott. MSS.*, Vesp. C. p. 14). His personal influence over the queen increased the odium of his mal-administration; and his being publicly arrested "in her chamber" (*Sandford*, book iv. p. 294) and presence, during the king's appalling illness, and thence committed by the lords to the Tower, did not tend to discourage the reports relative to the illegitimacy of the Prince of Wales; although Somerset's committal is by himself alleged to have been ordered by the privy council solely to secure his personal safety.—*Harl. MS.* 543, p. 163.

* The Duke of York's title to the throne will be more clearly shown by the following pedigree:—



of settlement was passed, to which the royal assent was given by the weak and imbecile monarch,* and an income of 10,000*l.* per annum, an enormous sum in those days, was awarded to Richard, Duke of York; when this new parliamentary admission of his title was added to the lineal claims of the House of Mortimer, of which he was the representative.

The queen was sojourning with the young prince, at the castle of Harlech in North Wales,† whither she had fled for refuge after the capture of King Henry, and the defeat of the Lancastrians at Northampton,‡ when this important decision was communicated to her, accompanied by the royal mandate, enforcing, in no measured terms, their immediate and peaceable return to court.§ Spurning with indignation and disdain an enactment which deprived her son of his inheritance, and limited her own and her husband's regal position to the mere sufferance of Parliament, Margaret fled instantly to Scotland, and implored, in all the agony of desperation, assistance from its youthful monarch,|| through the medium of the queen regent, Mary of Gueldres, his mother, who ruled during his minority. She assembled, by the co-operation of her northern partisans, the Earl of Northumberland and the Lord Clifford, such a powerful force in so incredibly short a period, that it enabled her immediately to defy the decision of Parliament, and to resist the commands of her pusillanimous lord and sovereign.

The Duke of York, unprepared for such prompt measures, hastened to crush at its outset an opposition so formidable to his recently admitted claims to the crown. He foresaw not that he was hastening to his destruction, and that the crown so fatally contested by his ancestors, so recently secured to himself and his heirs, would never grace either his own brow or that of his youthful rival. Accompanied by his second son, Edmund, Duke of Rutland, and by his brother-in-law, the Earl of Salisbury, he reached, by forced marches, his patrimonial castle of Sendal, with about 6000 men, on the 21st December, 1460, in which stronghold he held his Christmas, and was to have been speedily joined there by a powerful force from Wales, headed by his eldest son, the Earl of March, whom he hastily dispatched to summon his vassals on this important occasion. But the fate of Richard Plantagenet was destined to be irrevocably sealed, and the furious contests between him and Margaret of Anjou brought to a sudden and final close by the approaching battle of Wakefield. The intrepid queen had already crossed the Scottish frontiers, and being joined by her favourite Somerset and the heroic Earls of Devon and Wilts,¶ she reached the gates of York before the duke was in any position to encounter the formidable force which she had assembled. Heedless of the advice of his friends,** and regarding only the taunts of his enemies, in an unguarded moment the brave and high-minded Duke of York sallied forth from his castle,†† and was induced, under peculiarly disadvantageous circumstances, increased by the breach of faith and dishonourable conduct of the Lancastrian leaders, to encounter his vindictive foes.

The battle was brief, but the result was most important; for after a desperate conflict, and the display, on the part of the duke, of coolness, courage,

* *Rot. Parl.*, p. 380.

† *Warkworth Chron.*, p. 35.

‡ *Paston Letters*, vol. ii. p. 51.

§ *W. Wyr.*, p. 481.

|| James I., King of Scotland, married in 1424 Joane, daughter of John I., Earl of Somerset, and granddaughter of John of Gaunt. It was from their grandson, James III., thus closely allied to the House of Lancaster, that Margaret of Anjou at this time entreated assistance; his royal parent, James II., having fallen a victim to zeal for her husband's cause a few months previously at the siege of Roxburgh, August 3d, 1460.—*Granger's Biog. Hist.*, p. 33.

¶ *W. Wyr.*, p. 484.

** See Appendix H.

†† *W. Wyr.*, p. 485.

and valour, worthy of his high repute, the noble warrior, covered with wounds, and maintaining his intrepid courage and his undaunted spirit to the last, was surrounded by foes, and overpowered by superior numbers.* Being taken prisoner, with his faithful kinsman, the Earl of Salisbury, he was, after a short delay, put to death in a manner so aggravated by the bitter insults that preceded its execution, that it portrays far better than all comment the ferocious spirit which degraded the character of the English nobility during these domestic feuds.

Being dragged in mockery to an ant-hill, and crowned by a diadem of knotted grass,† he was insultingly placed there as on a throne, before which his enemies deridingly made their submission, exclaiming, in unhallowed perversion of sacred language, "Hail! king without a kingdom. Hail! prince without a people."‡

Cruelty having been heaped on scorn, and the worst passions of vengeance and hatred indulged to satiety, he was at length beheaded§ amidst the most exulting shouts.|| His head, fixed on a lance, was presented in triumph to the queen, and speedily placed by her commands over the gates of York,¶ surmounted in derision by a paper crown;** by its side were also arranged the heads of Salisbury and many of his devoted adherents.††

The Earl of Rutland, his second son, a youth of seventeen,‡‡ most prepossessing in appearance and of singular beauty, flying from the fatal spot with his tutor, Robert Aspell, the duke's chaplain, was overtaken by the Lord Clifford; and the royal stripling, in reply to his prayers for mercy, was stabbed with unrelenting ferocity to the heart.§§

The inhumanity of this savage deed, and the active part taken by this nobleman in the death and insults offered to the Duke of York, procured for him in after years the appellation of the "Black Clifford." The murder of the inoffensive Rutland, however, was fully avenged by the heavy retribution which was visited on the offspring of this cold-hearted chieftain after his own speedy decease, which occurred within a few months following that of his innocent victim; and, as if in requital for the treachery practised to York, by means almost similar||| to that which had effected the destruction of this prince and his son. The romantic fate of Henry "the Shepherd Lord," Clifford's heir, is too well known, however, to require a more particular detail in these pages.¶¶

Sad as was the tragedy which thus prematurely terminated the career of Richard, Duke of York, who, like his illustrious parent, was suddenly cut off by a violent and untimely death, it speedily put an end, for a brief interval

* Whethamstede, p. 489.

† Ibid.
‡ John Whethamstede, otherwise called Frumentarius, from whose cotemporary authority the above revolting details have been taken, was abbot of St. Alban's during the reigns of Henry VI. and Edward IV. He was an historian of repute, and wrote divers treatises; amongst others, a book of the record of things happening while he was abbot, which book Holinshed had seen, and in some passages of his time followed.—*Baker's Chronicle*, p. 201.

§ Hall's Chron., p. 251.

¶ Cont. Croyland, p. 530.

†† Rot. Parl., p. 466.

‡‡ Scarcely two historians agree respecting the age of the Earl of Rutland at this period; some representing him as *six*, others as having attained his *tenth* and *twelfth* year. But the coeval testimony of William of Worcester leaves no doubt as regards the date of his birth, which he fixes at Rouen, in May, 1443; consequently, at the time of his assassination, the young earl must have been seventeen years of age.—See *W. Wyr. Ann. apud Hearne*, p. 461.

§§ Whethamstede, p. 489. Hall, 251.

|| Habington's Life of Edward IV., p. 16.

|| Appendix I.

** W. Wyr., p. 485.

¶¶ Appendix J.

at least, to the barbarities exercised for so many years by the contending factions. Goaded to desperation by the bitter insults heaped on their idolized leader, the Yorkists speedily rallied their full force round the heir of the unfortunate duke; and fighting with an energy and zeal that nothing could resist, they quickly recovered, under the young Earl of March, the ascendancy that seemed irrevocably lost on the execution of his ill-fated parent.

Victory followed upon victory, and vengeance was summarily taken on the sanguinary leaders of the late disastrous affray. Henry VI., Queen Margaret, and their son, Edward, Prince of Wales, after many desperate conflicts, fled into Scotland for refuge; and Edward of March, now Duke of York, having proceeded to London,* whither he was invited both by the nobles and the people, was proclaimed king, under the plea that Henry had violated his solemn pledge to the nation,† but in reality from that monarch's utter incapacity to rule, and the odium excited in the metropolis, and throughout the country generally, by the excesses‡ of the royalists' party both at Wakefield and St. Alban's. Whatever was the accelerating cause, the transition of the sceptre from the line of Lancaster to that of York was rapid and decisive; the young duke was elected king, and taking possession of the throne of his ancestors, he was crowned at Westminster within three months of his father's untimely death;§ and by the title of Edward IV. became the acknowledged sovereign of these realms, and founder of the Yorkist dynasty.

Leaving him in the full enjoyment of dominions which had been secured by so fearful a waste of human life and treasure, and having briefly portrayed the existing state of public affairs from the usurpation of the line of Lancaster, in the person of Henry IV., to the period which chronicles the accession of the House of York in that of King Edward IV., it is now the fitting time to commence the private and personal history of the prince who is to form the subject of the present memoir, and whose feelings and impressions, from the earliest dawn of reason, could not fail to be influenced by the violent passions and struggle for power which, in defiance of all principle, moral or religious, marked the period in which Richard of Gloucester was born.

* W. Wyr., p. 489.

† Rot. Parl., p. 465.

‡ The chronicler of Croyland, in narrating the effect of the battle of Wakefield on the minds of King Henry's supporters, states that, "elated with their victory, they rushed like a whirlwind over England, and plundered without respect of persons or place. They attacked the churches, took away their vessels, books, and clothes; even the sacramental pyxes, shaking out the eucharist, and slew the priests who resisted. So they acted for a breadth of thirty miles, all the way from York nearly up to London."—*Chron. Croy.*, p. 531.

§ W. Wyr., p. 490.