

The Good Parliament. The parliament of 1376, which lived in men's memories by the name of the Good Parliament, had the full support of the prince of Wales. It was able to overthrow the king's ministers, to remove his favourite Alice Perrers from court, and to encumber him with a council. A crowd of petitions of various kinds were presented, some of them insisting on freedom of election. The houses separated; the prince died; all the acts of the parliament were set at nought; most of them were reversed by a packed parliament the next year. Yet even this packed parliament established some wholesome doctrines, and amongst others enacted that no statute should be made at the petition of the clergy without the consent of the Commons. The same alternation of reforming and reactionary parliaments is found under Richard II. There is no surer witness to the importance of any assembly or other institution than the fact that the ruling powers find it convenient to corrupt or pervert it.

John Wickliffe.

When we turn to the religious, the social, and the literary aspect of this period, we may be amazed at the way in which the three are all intertwined together, and in which they all gather round a single man. We cannot write the history of the fourteenth century in any of these aspects, we cannot write the history of the fifteenth as affected by causes which had their beginning in the fourteenth, without bringing in the name of John Wickliffe. As a man who was employed in important negotiations with foreign powers, he has earned his place in any minute record even of the outward political history of his time. But it is in these other three branches that he stands out as the foremost figure of his time. But, while he is prominent in all three alike, it is his religious position which is primary. His influence on our social and literary history is secondary, and acts wholly through his religious position. Wickliffe, a renowned schoolman and doctor of Oxford, a well benefited secular priest, and not unknown in the political world, made himself the centre and the mouth-piece of the great need of his time. The fourteenth century saw the beginning of a cry for a religious reformation in a wider sense than a mere reform of the abuses of the moment. Reforms of that kind have been demanded, promised, and indeed partly attempted, in almost every age. The day of the monks was past when the day of the friars began; and now the day of the friars was past also. They too had fallen from their first love, and the abuses of the mendicant orders formed one of the chief subjects of declamation for the reformers of the time. The bounty of founders now took another form. The foundation of colleges in the universities went on briskly all through the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Schools and hospitals, chantries and colleges of priests attached to parish churches, were largely founded; but the foundation of monasteries was now rare. The great foundations of William of Wykeham at Winchester and Oxford, followed by those of Henry VI. at Eton and Cambridge, form an æra in the history of education in England.

Foundation of colleges.

It is singular that this new class of foundations was largely helped by an act of legislation which might well pass for spoliation of the Church. The fourteenth century and the beginning of the fifteenth was a busy time of legislation on ecclesiastical matters. The political strife with the Roman see went on in full vigour, with all the more vigour because the Roman see had in some sort ceased to be a Roman see. In the fourteenth century the popes were no longer the common fathers of Christendom, ruling from the centre of Christendom. They had forsaken Rome for Avignon, a city close to the French border, and where they were the tools of the king of the neighbouring realm. The popes of Rome had been oppressors and

spoilors of England; the popes of Avignon were her political enemies, the allies of her rivals in Britain and on the continent. When, later in the century, Rome and Avignon became the seats of rival popes, England was naturally found on the side of the pope of Rome, France and Scotland on the side of the pope of Avignon. But, whether at Rome or at Avignon, the foreign ecclesiastical power had to be kept in check. A series of statutes designed to check papal encroachments marks the reign of Edward III., and still more conspicuously marks the reign of Richard II. The statute of provisors checked the interference of the popes with the disposal of English benefices. The statute of *premunire* denounced the heaviest penalties against the unauthorized introduction of papal bulls into the kingdom. Legislation of this kind was indeed only repressing innovations; it was bringing the law back to what it had been in the days of King Eadward and King William. Under the house of Lancaster, the spirit of opposition to the papal claims grew fainter, at all events on the part of the kings. In the appointment of bishops especially, pope and king found it easy to play into one another's hands, at the expense of the ecclesiastical electors. Meanwhile, from the reign of Edward III. onwards, opposition to the aggressions of the head of the Church abroad grew into a dangerous hankering after the possessions of the Church at home. In the later days of Edward a strong party of the baronage, headed by John of Gaunt, were zealous for ecclesiastical reform, in the sense of confiscation of ecclesiastical property and of the exclusion of churchmen from political office. In the reign of Henry IV. a scheme was proposed in the Commons for the general confiscation of ecclesiastical revenues. This storm was turned aside, but the hand of disendowment fell heavily in the next reign on one class of ecclesiastical foundations, though, as it turned out, greatly to the profit of another class. The new colleges and other foundations were largely endowed out of the revenues of the alien priories. These were monasteries in England which were dependent on greater monasteries in Normandy or elsewhere beyond the sea. During the wars with France these alien houses were looked on as outposts of the enemy, and in the reign of Henry V. they were finally suppressed. By far the greater part of their revenues went to the educational and secular foundations which were growing up at Oxford, Cambridge, and elsewhere. A king and a primate, both of them of a piety unusual in that age, Henry V. and Archbishop Chicheley, were the chief actors in this alienation of ecclesiastical revenues by the secular power.

Designs against church property.

Suppression of alien priories.

But changes of this kind were not religious reformation; they were hardly ecclesiastical reform. It is plain that the corruptions of the Church were growing; everything shows the prevalence of a hard, secular, grasping spirit in ecclesiastical relations. The primates of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries are, if we except the momentary primacy of Thomas Bradwardine, an inferior race to those of the thirteenth. Men cried, as they had ever cried, for the reform of practical evils, and they now began to go much further. They began to attack the whole ecclesiastical system, and even the received doctrines of the Church. It was held that heresy was a crime at common law; but, as a matter of fact, religious dissent of any kind was rarely heard of in England from the earliest times till the fourteenth century. The most remarkable case in earlier times was in the reign of Henry II., when a company of foreigners, belonging to some of the sects of Southern Europe, succeeded in making a single English proselyte. But the teaching of Wickliffe in the fourteenth century was the beginning of the religious changes of the sixteenth century. Wickliffe, the founder of a sect which suffered much persecution, can hardly be said to have been

Teaching of Wickliffe.

persecuted himself. His doctrines led directly to the unlawfulness of the whole ecclesiastical system, and specially to the unlawfulness of ecclesiastical property. Those doctrines he sent forth his poor priests to teach; but he himself lived and died in quiet possession of the rectory of Lutterworth. A reformer, theological, moral, and political, he allied himself with John of Gaunt, as the Puritans did in after times with Robert Dudley, though the duke's schemes of reform were certainly of a more earthly kind than those of the doctor. But this union came to an end when another side of Wickliffe's teaching, one which was doubtless not designed by Wickliffe himself, came into notice. This age was beyond all others the age of social change, or at least of events which led to the greatest social change. Causes which had doubtless been working long before came to a head under the joint influence of a fearful physical stroke and of the new religious teaching.

We may safely set down the great plague of 1349, known as the Black Death, as the greatest of all social landmarks in English history. While the chivalrous king was keeping the feast of the foundation of the Order of the Garter, half the inhabitants of his kingdom were swept away by the pestilence. The natural results followed. We have seen that one of the gradual results of the Norman Conquest was to fuse together the churls, the lowest class of freemen, along with the slaves in the intermediate class of villains. By this time personal slavery had pretty well died out; but villainage was still in full force. But various causes—among them the frequent emancipation of the villains—had called into being a class of free labourers alongside of the villains. When the plague cut off so large a proportion of the whole people, labour became scarcer, and higher wages were naturally demanded. Parliament after parliament, beginning in the very year of the Black Death, tried, in the interests of the employers of labour, to keep wages at their old rate. The Good Parliament itself did not shrink from this selfish and impossible attempt. The discontent caused by these statutes, the general stirring of men's minds of which Wickliffe and the Vision of the Ploughman are alike witnesses, led, under the preaching of some of Wickliffe's wilder and fiercer disciples, to the great peasant outbreak of 1381, the insurrection which has chiefly become famous through the story of Wat Tyler. The young king, undoubtedly outstripping his legal powers, promised freedom to all the villains. This promise the next parliament not unnaturally refused to confirm. Two results followed. Though the villains were not at once emancipated, yet from this time villainage gradually died out, as slavery had already died out. Neither institution was ever abolished by law; but all the slaves gradually became villains, all the villains gradually became freemen. By the end of the fifteenth century, villainage was hardly known, except here and there on ecclesiastical estates. The clergy had always preached the emancipation of the villains as a good work. Yet they were the slowest of all landowners to emancipate their own villains. In this there is no real inconsistency. The layman might do what he would with his own; he might dispense with services owing to himself. Those who were at any moment the members of an ecclesiastical corporation might be held not to have the same right to emancipate their villains, that is, to make away with the rights of the corporation itself.

The revolt of the villains.

Gradual dying out of villainage.

The other great result of the peasant uprising was to associate in men's minds the two ideas of religious reformation and political, or rather social, revolution. Wickliffe was himself as guiltless of the revolt of the villains as Luther was of the Peasants' War or of the reign of the Anabaptists. But in both cases the teaching of the more moderate reformer had a real connexion with the doings of

the reformers who outstripped him. From this time Lollardy, as the teaching of Wickliffe was called, was under a cloud. It was held to be all one, not only with heresy, but with revolution. Wickliffe himself died in peace; but for the few years that he outlived the revolt, he lost all political influence and political support. The reign of Richard was hostile to the ecclesiastical order at home and abroad. Yet it produced in 1382 the first statute against heresy, the penalties of which did not go beyond imprisonment. It was regularly passed; yet the Commons in the next parliament expressly demanded that it should be declared null. The first statute for the burning of heretics dates from the reign of Henry IV., from which time the stake was their legal doom. But the number of heretics to burn was not great. The most famous victim was Sir John Oldcastle, Lord Cobham, who was hanged and burned under Henry V. on a combined charge of treason and heresy. Thus far the political character of Lollardy shows itself. But through the rest of the fifteenth century, though we ever and anon hear of a martyrdom, religious dissent was so thoroughly discredited as to be of no political importance.

Wickliffe was thus the direct author of a religious change, He was indirectly, if not the author, at least the unintentional abettor, of a social and political change. His place in the history of English literature is at least equal to his place in religious and political history. He was the father of later English prose writing. Since the sudden close of the Peterborough Chronicle, English prose writing had never quite died out, but it had remained something quite secondary by the side of English verse. But in the fourteenth century the English language again won back its own place. Now that the English nation had been formed again in its new shape, it was needful to proclaim the fact to the world by some unmistakable outward sign. That sign was found in the restoration of the national language to its rights as the acknowledged speech of the land, and that restoration was brought about by the same cause which first showed the regenerate English nation in the character of a great European power. It was the French war which completed the triumph of the English tongue. The men who had overcome the French enemy on his own soil could not endure that the French tongue should remain in use on the soil of Edward III.'s reign English displaced French as the speech of education and as the speech of the courts of law. Statutes are still drawn up in French, but speeches in parliament are now in English. The ministers of the crown address the houses, and Henry of Lancaster claims the crown, in the native speech of the land. At last, under Henry V., negotiations were carried on with France by ambassadors who knew not the French tongue. From this time the use of French in public documents, an use which still lingered till the end of the fifteenth century, was as mere a survival as the two or three formulæ which are couched in French still.

Language and literature; triumph of English over French.

Thus after the ups and downs of three hundred years, English was now again the acknowledged speech of England, the one common speech of Englishmen of all ranks. But the ancient tongue, in winning back its ancient place, had greatly changed its ancient character. The two great changes in language which the effects of the Norman Conquest had rather strengthened than begun, the loss of inflexions and the constant introduction of foreign words, had had more and more effect as the speakers of the two tongues grew closer together, as the use of one or the other marked no longer a national but merely a social distinction. The English tongue which thus, in the course of the fourteenth century, won back its place from French, was a form of English which had lost or corrupted most of the

old grammatical forms, which had adopted a crowd of foreign words, and which had even displaced many English words to make way for them. Still the unbroken continuity, the personal being as it were, of the native tongue remained untouched. We may say that in one age French displaced English, that in another age English displaced French. But the English tongue always remained the English tongue. The tongue of Chaucer did not displace the tongue of Beowulf; the elder form of the language changed into the younger by gradual and imperceptible shades. The fourteenth century was one of the great periods of English literature. The devotional vein which had never ceased, the satirical vein which had begun—most likely begun again—in the thirteenth century, flowed together in the fourteenth to form the great work, religious, moral, and social, of William Langland, the Vision of Piers the Ploughman. And after the English poet of the people soon came the English poet of more courtly life and more courtly speech in the person of Geoffrey Chaucer. And alongside of these more famous names we have a considerable mass of verse, political and satirical, on the events of the times. But while a hundred years earlier compositions of this kind were written indifferently in three languages, we have them now in two only; they are written in Latin and in English, but never in French. We have indeed one French chronicle of this time, that which records the deposition and death of Richard; but it is the work of a Frenchman.* But it is now that English prose comes to the front in the hands of Wicliffe, in the form of his translation of the Bible and of his countless popular tracts. From his time a series of prose writers has never failed us. The English version of the travels of Sir John Mandeville in the fourteenth century, the theological writings of Bishop Reginald Peacock in the fifteenth, carry on the series from the days of the great master. Prose history in English does not appear in the fourteenth century, and it is of small importance in the fifteenth. But that is the case with our history generally. The old series of the Latin historians of England is but feebly represented in the fourteenth century, and it can hardly be said to be represented at all in the fifteenth. The great school of St Albans comes down to Thomas of Walsingham and Abbot Whethamstead. But we now look in vain at St Albans for successors of Matthew Paris, as we look in vain elsewhere for successors of William of Malmesbury or William of Newburgh.

Summary

It is therefore not too much to say that, in the course of this period, the period of the Hundred Years' War, England finally took its modern shape. The essence of the constitution, the main points of the law, the dominant language, all took a shape which has since been changed only in detail. In all these things the formation of the England that was to be was brought to perfection in this age. And if the remaining distinctive characteristic of England was not brought to perfection in this age, the first steps to it were already taken. The papal claims were narrowly limited by law; ecclesiastical revenues were alienated by authority of parliament; if strictly religious reformation obtained no legal sanction, yet its seeds were now for the first time sown in the heart of the people. And if this was the age when the main features of English political life put on their present form, it was no less so with the main features of English social life. The distinguishing elements of English society, the peer as distinguished from the continental noble, the country gentleman, the farmer, the free labourer—all of them elements so specially English—all take nearly their present shape during this time. Villainage, if not actually abolished, received its death-blow. The mingling of classes is shown even by the oligarchic statutes which tried in some measure to

hinder it. Esquires had long represented shires as well as actual knights. The rich citizen could buy a landed estate, and in a generation or two his children counted as esquires. The towns were growing in wealth and political importance, but their internal constitutions were getting narrower. The law was administered by nearly the same courts as it is now, and the abundance of lawsuits kept all courts, great and small, fully supplied with business. This growth of the law, the specially English law, statute and common, led to the rapid growth and increasing importance of the class of professional lawyers, men who practised the statute and common law of England, as distinguished from the professors of the law of Rome, civil and canon. Their importance is shown in the fourteenth century, by a petition of the Commons that the practitioners of the law might not be returned as knights of the shire; it was more terribly shown towards the end of that century in the bitter hatred towards the whole lawyer class which was shown in the peasant revolt. But notwithstanding both laws and lawyers, we find that powerful men, to say nothing of the king himself, were often able to interfere with the due administration of the law. But this fault is common to all lands. What is specially English is that, though the law was often broken, yet the law remained to rebuke those who broke it, and to triumph over them in the end.

Thus, on the whole, practical peace and order, as well as constitutional freedom, steadily advanced during this age. Not the smallest sign of its advance is the marked improvement in domestic architecture. The style which came in with the latter half of the fourteenth century and went on in use during the fifteenth, is commonly looked on as a decline from the style of the thirteenth and early fourteenth century. Yet, even as applied to churches, this style is not without its own merits, and it is the characteristic domestic style of England. Up to the end of the thirteenth century, we have but small remains of houses, houses as distinguished from castles and not built within the walls of a town. But in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries England was covered with houses of all classes, manor-houses, parsonages, houses of substantial yeomen, of wood or stone according to their district, often excellent examples of the architecture of the time, and witnessing to the general state of security in the greater part of the country. We at once contrast them with the houses of the same and of a much later date on the Scottish border and in Ireland, where the esquire and the priest still had to live for safety's sake in the pele-tower. This last is in truth nothing but a continuation of the square Norman keep in a smaller and ruder form. In short, in England security, liberty, and political rights were spread over the whole country. They were not, as in most other lands, confined to the inhabitants either of fortified towns or of private strongholds.

Three hundred and fifty years of struggle had thus made England once more fully herself after the great overthrow of the Norman Conquest. In a formal narrative of English history, our tale would now, as it draws nearer and nearer to our own time, be fittingly told in greater detail at each stage. In a sketch like the present the opposite process would seem to be no less fitting. We now know what England is. She has made herself; she has won her rights; she has now to defend, to secure, when needful to reform; she has no longer any need to create. The only exception is with regard to her religious history. In other respects all that has henceforth to be done is to keep what has already been gained. In the religious department alone, there is still something to be gained, something, if not to be created, at least to be put into a wholly new shape.

Advance of domestic architecture.

This great period of three hundred and fifty years, broken, as we have dealt with it, into several smaller periods, this period of creative struggle, is followed by another great period of about two hundred and fifty years. This is still a time of struggle, but in political matters of mainly defensive struggle, while in religious matters the struggle is still, in a lower sense, creative. This long period again falls into three smaller periods. The first is the time of the civil wars of York and Lancaster, a time during which the fabric of freedom which had been built up with so much toil begins to yield, in outward appearance at least, to the growth of an almost despotic power in the crown. Then comes the time of Tudor dominion, the time which, while it saw the greatest development of royal power, saw also the great religious change which was needed to complete the later character of England. Lastly, there is the time of renewed struggle, political and religious alike, against the feebler despotism of the Stuarts. Of these three periods, the first, answering nearly to the second half of the fifteenth century, has little religious interest. In the second, answering nearly to the sixteenth century, though the political interest is great, the religious interest surpasses it. In the third period, answering nearly to the seventeenth century, the religious and the political interest go side by side. But through the whole both of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it is the importance of the religious interest which gives the period its special character. While, in political matters, men are simply striving to preserve or to win back an old freedom, in religious matters they are striving to establish a wholly new freedom.

The Wars of the Roses.

Beginning then, as before, with the most prominent outward characteristics of the several periods, the feature which first strikes us is that the hundred years of foreign war are followed by a period of about half the length, the chief feature of which is the great civil strife of the fifteenth century, the strife between the houses of York and Lancaster, commonly known as the Wars of the Roses. It would seem as if the failure of schemes of continental dominion on the part of England had driven Englishmen to spend their energies in biting and devouring one another at home. The fifty years after the final loss of Aquitaine form a time which, especially towards its end, is of much importance in other ways. But this feature of constant civil war, war waged to settle the disputed succession to the crown, is that which gives to the time its most distinguishing character. Wars with Scotland and with France go on very much as before. One year there is a raid; the next year there is a truce. But warfare of this kind is of little importance in a general view of the period. All hope of the conquest or serious dismemberment of either of the hostile countries has passed away. The origin of this great civil strife was to appearance purely genealogical. The claim of Roger earl of March to succeed Richard II., by virtue of descent in the female line from an elder son of Edward III., showed the new doctrines in their extremest form. But all claims on this score had been set aside by the repeated acts of parliament which gave the crown to Henry IV. and his heirs. No title could be better than that of the Lancastrian kings; and, amid the glories of the reign of Henry V., the genealogical fancy which was all that could be pleaded for the other family seems gradually to have been forgotten. But, just about the time of the loss of Aquitaine, a number of circumstances joined together to give a renewed importance to their claims. Those claims had now passed to Richard duke of York, who in the male line represented a son of Edward III. younger than John of Gaunt, but who in the female line represented the elder brother Lionel. The weakness of Henry VI., sometimes growing into absolute imbecility, was

Claims of the house of York.

now manifest. His foreign queen and his ministers, the dukes of Suffolk and Somerset, were unpopular on various grounds, specially on account of the losses in France. Duke Richard, on the other hand, was an able and popular nobleman, who had won reputation both in France and in Ireland. As long as Henry was childless, he might be looked on as heir-presumptive to the crown. The only possible competitor was the duke of Somerset himself. Somerset represented a branch of the royal family which was of doubtful legitimacy, that of the natural children of John of Gaunt, who had been legitimated by Parliament, but whose position as regarded the royal succession was not clear.¹ In 1450 a popular insurrection under Jack Cade, who called himself Mortimer, might pass for a sign that the claims of that family were not forgotten. The duke of Suffolk, impeached by the Commons, but not sentenced by the Lords, had been irregularly put to death. Somerset now remained as the unpopular minister, while Richard of York was the leader of a popular opposition. The birth of the king's only son in 1453 took away the duke's hope of a peaceful succession, and in 1455 the civil war began.

The war of York and Lancaster, like the great war with France, with its occasional lulls and truces, must be looked on as really lasting, notwithstanding reconciliations, restorations, and momentary reigns, from the time when the sword was first drawn against Henry VI. to the time when it was last drawn against Henry VII. One thing is to be noted throughout, that, after every revolution, a parliament was always found ready to condemn the defeated side, and to acknowledge the rights of the conqueror. Thus, in the early stage of the war, the duke of York was attainted in 1459. In 1460 the victory of Northampton put him in a position to make good his claim to the crown. A compromise was brought about by the Lords, which sounds as if it had been suggested by the treaty of Troyes. By their award it was agreed that Henry should keep the crown for life, but that the duke should displace the king's son in the rank of heir apparent. Such an award implied the admission of the new doctrine of absolute hereditary right in its extremest form. At the same time, it saved the personal rights of the crowned king to whom the claimant had sworn allegiance. But this settlement on paper had no practical effect. The queen and the lords of her party disregarded it. In 1460 Duke Richard fell at Wakefield, and his claims passed to his son Edward. The compromise was now set aside on both sides. Henry had joined, or had been made to join, the queen's forces after the victory of Wakefield. The Yorkist doctrine was that, by so doing, he had broken the award, and had thereby forfeited the crown, which therefore passed to Edward. The claims of Edward were confirmed by a kind of popular election in London. After his crowning victory at Towton followed his coronation, and a fresh parliamentary settlement, which declared the victor of Agincourt an usurper. The reign of Edward IV. is now held to begin; but the war was not yet over. Margaret sought help in Scotland and France, and Scottish help was bought by the surrender of Berwick. The war began again in 1463, and this stage of it may be looked on as ended by the Yorkist victory at Hexham in 1464. The next year Henry was captured. But by this time Edward had taken a step which led to the estrangement of his most powerful supporters. His marriage with one of his subjects, Elizabeth Grey, and the growing influence of her family, the Woodvilles, began to offend the house of Neville,

¹ The case of the Beaufort family, earls and dukes of Somerset, is clearly stated by Lingard, iii. 357. The original patent of 1397 did not in so many words except the succession to the crown, but it did so by implication, by making the persons legitimated capable of all dignities short of the crown, but making no mention of the crown itself. In the later copies the crown was expressly excepted.

Duration of the civil war.

Duke Richard made heir to Henry VI.

Edward IV.

Restoration of Henry.

and its head Richard earl of Warwick. After a series of almost unintelligible intrigues and insurrections, Edward was in 1470 driven out of the kingdom by an union between Warwick and the king's own brother, George duke of Clarence. Henry VI. was now taken from prison and again declared king. The crown was settled by parliament on him and his son, with remainder to Clarence. But in the next year Edward came back; Clarence again changed sides, and the crown was secured to Edward by the fights of Barnet and Tewkesbury. At Tewkesbury Edward the son of Henry was killed; the death—we may feel sure that it was the murder—of Henry himself followed. The legitimate male line of Lancaster was now extinct; no descendant of any one of the sons of Henry IV. survived. There were foreign princes descended from John of Gaunt in the female line, and among them the famous Charles duke of Burgundy, who seems, among the other objects of his ambition, to have sometimes dreamed of the English crown for himself. Such claims were not likely to meet with any support in England; and Edward, by a stroke of real policy, won Charles to his side by the hand of his sister Margaret, and found shelter at his brother-in-law's court during his exile. In England the hopes of the Lancastrian party now turned in a new direction, to legitimated descendants of John of Gaunt of the house of Somerset. That house also was extinct in the male line; its representative was Margaret, countess of Richmond. Her young son, Henry Tudor, earl of Richmond, was now, in the lack of any better claimant, looked on as the heir of Lancaster. It is needless to say that no genealogical subtlety could be held to give him any share in the royalty which the choice of the nation had conferred on the line of Henry IV. But something of the sentiment of royal descent might be held to have come to Henry in a strange way through his father's mother. She was no other than Katharine of France, the widow of Henry V., who married a Welshman named Owen Tudor, in whose descendants the crown of England passed, by a strange genealogical accident, to the ancient stock of Britain.

Henry earl of Richmond

Second reign of Edward IV.

For the remaining twelve years of his life Edward IV. reigned without any important disturbance at home. But the members of the house of York had already begun to turn one against another. The validity of Edward's marriage, and therefore the legitimacy of his children, was doubtful. Clarence was in any case the next in succession after them, while, by the statute passed during Henry's second reign, he had a claim before Edward himself. In 1478 this dangerous brother was condemned in parliament on a vague charge of treason; and he presently died, though not by any public execution. The latter years of Edward IV. were taken up chiefly with foreign policy and foreign war, both of which were on rather a small scale. A Scottish war from 1480 to 1482 is remarkable for the recovery of Berwick. In continental politics Edward was specially busy. His policy took largely the form of planning foreign marriages for his children, none of which were carried into effect. Even before he was driven out in 1470, he was trying to form alliances against France, especially with Charles of Burgundy. But, though Charles sheltered Edward in his exile, he gave him no real support when in 1475 he actually began an invasion of France. Edward, as well as Charles, was outwitted by Lewis XI. The king and his counsellors went home, without glory or conquest, but with large bribes of French money.

The death of Edward in 1483 again, nominally at least, gave the crown to a minor, Edward, the eldest son of the late king. The suspicions which had been vaguely raised against John of Gaunt during the minority of Richard II. became realities in the case of the ambitious uncle of Edward V. This was Richard duke of Gloucester, the

youngest son of Richard duke of York, who was declared protector of the young king. His protectorate was marked by the illegal slaughter of several of the lords of the party of the queen mother. Presently Richard's own adherents claimed the crown for him. The claim was based on the alleged invalidity of Edward IV.'s marriage. Some ventured on the more improbable scandal that neither Edward nor Clarence was really a son of Duke Richard, and that Richard of Gloucester was his only real representative. A more decent argument was found in the attainder of George of Clarence, which, it was held, shut out his children from the succession. An irregular kind of election, which however professed to be made by the estates of the realm, called on Richard to assume the crown. He was crowned instead of his nephew; and there can be little doubt that both Edward and his brother Richard duke of York were made away with, like Arthur in earlier days, at the bidding of their uncle. The ancient custom of England would have spared all these crimes. Richard, who had in other respects many of the qualities of a good ruler, would doubtless have been chosen on the death of his brother. As it was, his crown was at once threatened by Henry of Richmond, who now passed for the representative of the house of Lancaster. The aim of his party was to marry him to Elizabeth, daughter of Edward IV., who now represented the more regular succession of the house of York. Richmond was in banishment in Brittany. The first attempts of himself and his partisans were crushed. At this stage of our history everything turns on marriages and genealogies. The deaths of Richard's queen Anne Neville and his son Edward open a new stage in the tale. John earl of Lincoln, the son of the king's sister Elizabeth duchess of Suffolk, was now declared the presumptive heir. But Richard now designed a marriage with his own niece Elizabeth, to which she and her mother seem to have consented. This plan hastened the schemes of Richmond. He landed, raised an army, and, helped by the treachery of the Stanleys and Percies, he overthrew Richard at Bosworth, August 22, 1485. Henry was crowned, and a parliament settled the crown on him and the heirs of his body, and none other. The new king clearly wished that his claims should be in no way dependent on his intended marriage with Elizabeth. Parliament, on the other hand, was clearly unwilling to give its formal sanction either to a right of conquest or to Henry's strange hereditary claim. Henry, in short, reigned by a parliamentary title, by an election which followed his coronation. In the next year however he carried out his promise of marrying Elizabeth; and, before the end of the year 1486, the birth of his eldest son, who, as the son of the first British king of England, received the name of Arthur, seemed to put the succession on a sure ground.

Accession of Henry VII.

We are apt to look on Henry VII. as the founder of a dynasty, and on his reign as marking the beginning of a new era. Both views are true; but they must not be allowed to put out of sight the fact that, till quite the end of his reign, his throne was as insecure as that of any of his predecessors. The civil wars were not yet ended; in foreign lands Henry was looked on as a mere adventurer, who had won the crown by the chances of one battle, and who was likely to lose what he had won by the chances of another. Hence he was, like Edward IV. in the same case, specially anxious to establish his position among foreign princes. To obtain, as he did at last, an infant for his son, even to give his daughter to the king of Scots, were in his view important objects of policy. But those objects were not attained till after he had strengthened his position at home by successfully withstanding more than one enemy.

Position of Henry.

The revolts against Henry began early. Before the birth of his son, he had to crush the first insurrection of Lord Lovell. The next year enemies arose against him in

Revolts against Henry

Ireland. There the rule of the elder duke of York had been popular, and the Yorkist party had always been the stronger. A claimant appeared, one Lambert Simnel, who professed to be Edward earl of Warwick, son of George Duke of Clarence, the male representative of the house of York. Edward was indeed alive in the Tower, and was shown in public to prove the imposture. Yet Simnel was crowned in Ireland, and was presently supported by John earl of Lincoln, who had been himself declared heir presumptive under Richard. The impostor and his partisans landed in England, and were overthrown at Stoke-upon-Trent. In 1492 another and more dangerous claimant, who professed to be Richard duke of York, the son of Edward IV., and whose real name was understood to be Perkin Warbeck, appeared also in Ireland. His cause was taken up by more than one foreign potentate, by James IV., king of Scots, and by Margaret, the duchess dowager of Burgundy, who, if he was what he pretended to be, was his own aunt. He made more than one attempt at invasion, some of them in company with the king of Scots. Meanwhile, early in 1497, the men of Cornwall rose and marched as far as Blackheath, close to London. There they were defeated; but when, a few months later, Perkin landed in Cornwall, he found enough support there to besiege Exeter. But he shrank from a battle with the royal army; he submitted to the king, and was put to death in the next year, 1499. Immediately afterwards followed the beheading of Edward of Warwick. From this time, for the last ten years of his reign, Henry reigned in safety.

Peace with Scotland.

Beginning of the Tudor period.

The wars with France still lingered on, and in 1492 Henry had actually undertaken the siege of Boulogne. The enterprise was however ended by a treaty of peace. After Henry's throne was secured by the deaths of Perkin and of Edward of Warwick, his European position speedily rose. In 1501 Katharine of Aragon was married to Arthur, and, on his death in the next year, she was contracted to his younger brother Henry. Earlier in this year, 1502, a treaty of peace was concluded with Scotland, which was followed in 1503 by the marriage of James king of Scots and Henry's elder daughter Margaret. This marks an era in the relations between England and Scotland. Up to this time, ever since the enterprise of Edward Balliol, there had been constant warfare, interrupted only by truces. Now, for the first time, a peace, strictly so called, was concluded. All claims either to the crown of Scotland or to a superiority over it on the part of England must be looked on as being finally given up. There was still more than one war between England and Scotland before the union of the crowns; but the state of constant warfare broken only by truces now comes to an end.

In 1509 Henry VII. died. His eldest surviving son, Henry VIII., who now united the claims of York and Lancaster, succeeded without a breath of opposition. He was the first king since Richard II. who reigned by an undisputed title; and he was, strangely enough, the last king who was formally elected in ancient fashion in the ceremony of his coronation. With him, rather than with his father, a new period opens; or, more accurately still, the new period opens with the second period of Henry VII.'s reign, after all opposition to his title had passed away. When the first Tudor king felt himself safe, the Tudor despotism began. Under the second Tudor king that despotism allied itself with ecclesiastical change, and the sixteenth century put on its most characteristic aspect.

It was during this period that England came within the range of those general causes of change which were now beginning to affect all Europe. The revival of learning, as it is called, was now spreading from Italy into other lands. The three great inventions which in the course of the

fifteenth century affected the general state of mankind, gun powder, printing, and the compass, began in the course of the second half of that century to do their work on England also. The Wars of the Roses differ widely, in their military character, from the civil wars of earlier times. The personal displays of chivalry in the field, as well as the older style of fortification, both became useless before the new engines of destruction. But, above all things, it was during this time that, in most parts of Europe, the chief steps were taken towards that general overthrow of ancient liberties which reached its highest growth in the sixteenth century. Europe was massing itself into a system of powers, greater in extent and smaller in number, than heretofore. The masters of these powers were learning a more subtle policy in foreign affairs than those who went before them, and they were beginning to rest their trust at home on standing armies. We have reached the time of Lewis XI. and of Ferdinand of Aragon. While France had grown by the annexation of nearly all its vassal states, and of some states which were not its vassals, the new power of Spain was growing up, to develop in the next period into the gigantic dominion of the house of Austria. Italy, with the mass of its small commonwealths grouped together among a few larger states, some princely, some republican, becomes during this age the battlefield of the rival powers. This new state of things was not without its influence on England, though our insular position saved us from being so completely carried away as the continental nations. The power of the crown grew to a pitch which was altogether unknown at any earlier time except under the Conqueror and his immediate successors. Parliaments become more servile; sometimes they are dispensed with altogether. Arbitrary acts on the part of the crown are perhaps not more common than in earlier times; but they take a new character. When law is generally weak and is easily broken, the king's breaches of the law do not seem very different from breaches of the law on the part of other men. When the king has become powerful enough to enforce the law on other men, but fails to observe the law in his own acts, the fault is of another kind. It is no longer general lawlessness, but deliberate arbitrary rule.

Growth of the royal power.

Character of the Wars of the Roses.

It was to this state of things that England was tending during the whole of this time. The stir of civil war alternated with the repose of despotism. It might almost be said that the two went on side by side; for the Wars of the Roses were not a period of anarchy like the wars of Stephen and Matilda. The crown was fought for by contending princes at the head of great armies; but there was little or nothing of the wasting local and personal warfare of the earlier time. Except where the actual strife was waging, things went on much as usual. The king in possession was obeyed wherever his enemies were not in military occupation. After each revolution a parliament was ready to approve the change, to acknowledge the conqueror, to regulate the succession according to his pleasure, and commonly to attain the defeated prince and his supporters. It marks that the age of revolution was drawing to an end when the famous statute of Henry VII. declared that no man would be called in question for adhering to a king in possession, be his title good or bad. The care taken by every claimant of the crown to obtain a parliamentary acknowledgment of his right was at once a homage paid to the formal authority of parliaments and a heavy blow struck at their moral weight. The parliaments of this time were fast losing the spirit of the elder parliaments. The number of the temporal lords was lessened by battles, executions, and banishments. The spiritual lords had become more thoroughly servants of the crown than at any time since the twelfth century. The lower house had also undergone a change. In one sense