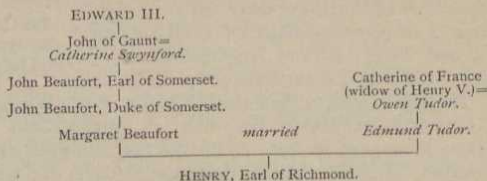


GENEALOGY OF HENRY TUDOR, EARL OF RICHMOND.



CHAPTER XXIX.

POLITICAL, SOCIAL, AND LITERARY PROGRESS DURING THE PLANTAGENET PERIOD.

1. During the three centuries and a quarter intervening between the accession of Henry of Anjou and the death at Bosworth of Richard of Gloucester, the political and social institutions of England underwent many important changes.

Great changes.
2. It became an accepted principle of the constitution that the throne should be occupied by an hereditary Sovereign ruling with limited powers. The limiting power was exercised by Parliament, and had respect to three grand principles:—(1.) That, without the Parliament, the King could neither make, repeal, nor alter laws; (2.) That no tax could be imposed without the sanction of Parliament; (3.) That the Sovereign must rule according to law, his responsible advisers being answerable to Parliament in case of its violation.

Limited monarchy.
3. With the growth of parliamentary power came the breaking up of the Feudal System. The barons ceased to be retainers of the Crown, rendering military service for lands held. They developed into an independent peerage of five orders or degrees—to wit, dukes, marquises, earls, viscounts, and barons. These titles, with their accompanying privileges, though in the first instance conferred by letters patent from the Sovereign, are hereditary.

Breaking up of the Feudal System.
4. The same causes that enlarged the powers of Parliament, and limited the prerogatives of the King, tended to abolish villeinage or serfdom. This desirable result was also much furthered by the active exertions of the clergy. The Church, imitating the example of her Divine Founder, denounced oppression, and secured the emancipation of thousands of unhappy serfs. The War of the Roses, by sweeping away almost the entire nobility, removed the only class especially interested in retaining villeinage, and this virtually extinguished it.

Extinction of villeinage.