

## CHAPTER LI.

## THE BRITISH CONSTITUTION.

1. The *Witenagemôt* of the Anglo-Saxons and the *Curia Regis* of the Early Norman Kings grew into the English Parliament, chiefly by the separation of the minor from the greater nobles, and the reinforcement of the former by representatives from the boroughs. This change, from which originated the House of Commons, began to be apparent in the reign of John. At the Revolution of 1688 the organization of the British Parliament was distinctly defined.

Origin of Parliament.

2. The Three Estates of the Realm, or constituent parts of the Parliament, are the Sovereign, the Lords, and the Commons. Thus the Constitution is not pure monarchy, pure aristocracy, or pure democracy, but a compound of all three; and in this chiefly lies its strength.

The Three Estates.

3. The office of Sovereign is hereditary, a woman being permitted to reign; for we have not, as they had in France, a Salic Law. The checks on the power of our Sovereign lie in the laws of the land, and the advice of Ministers, who are responsible to Parliament. The chief branches of the royal prerogative are, that the Sovereign alone can make war or peace; can pardon a convicted criminal; can summon, prorogue, or dissolve the Parliament; can coin money; can confer nobility. The assent of the Sovereign is necessary to the passing of a Bill. He or she must be a Protestant of the Church of England; and must maintain Presbyterianism in Scotland.

The Sovereign.

4. The Lords are of two kinds, Lords Spiritual and Lords Temporal: classified as follows:—

SPIRITUAL.	
English Archbishops .....	2
English Bishops .....	24
	— 26
TEMPORAL.	
English Peers .....	438
Scottish Peers .....	16
Irish Peers .....	28
	— 482
Total .....	508

The Temporal Peers are of six ranks:—Royal Princes, Dukes, Marquises, Earls, Viscounts, and Barons. Any number of new Peers may be created by the Sovereign. The Scottish Representative Peers are elected by their own body for every new Parliament; the Irish Peers hold their seats for life. Upwards of 45

The Lords.