

London and to murder the king. This was wholly false, but many people were put to death as a result.

187. **The succession to the throne.**—The religious question made it very difficult for Parliament to decide who should reign after Charles. His next heir was his brother James, but James was a Roman Catholic, and the country wished to have a Protestant. Parliament, led by Shaftesbury, one of the ablest of the statesmen of this time, tried to pass a bill called the Exclusion Bill, that would exclude James from the throne; but it failed, partly because the king did everything that he could against it, and partly because people could not unite upon a successor to Charles. Some wished to give the crown to the Duke of Monmouth, an illegitimate son of Charles, and some wished to give it to one of James's two daughters. They were both Protestants, and Mary, the elder, had married William, Prince of Orange. Some thought that the only safe way was to exclude James and his children. When it was found to be impossible to carry the bill through Parliament, a number of its extreme advocates, in 1683, formed a plot to murder both Charles and the Duke of York. The conspiracy, known as the Rye House plot, was discovered, and several of those concerned in it were executed.

188. **The "Habeas Corpus Act," 1679.**—In the midst of all these quarrels the famous "Habeas Corpus Act" was passed by Parliament. The Act gets its name from the first two words of the writ, or written order, issued by a judge, which directs the sheriff to have the accused person produced in court, in order that the judge may be satisfied that the prisoner is detained in jail for just cause; the words mean, "have the body." This had long been a leading principle of English law, but on many occasions it had, by various means, been disregarded. Both Mary of Scotland and Sir Walter Raleigh had spent long years in prison without any trial or legal sentence. By the Act of 1679, however, any man confined in jail can demand to be brought at once before a judge, and if no reasonable cause is shown why he should be kept in jail, he can demand his release. Under this Act it is no longer