

***CHARLES
OMAN***



***WARWICK,
THE KINGMAKER***

Charles Oman

Warwick, the Kingmaker

EAN 8596547353355

DigiCat, 2022

Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info



Table of Contents

[Cover](#)

[Titlepage](#)

[Text](#)

CHAPTER I

THE DAYS OF THE KINGMAKER

Of all the great men of action who since the Conquest have guided the course of English policy, it is probable that none is less known to the reader of history than Richard Neville Earl of Warwick and Salisbury. The only man of anything approaching his eminence who has been treated with an equal neglect is Thomas Cromwell, and of late years the great minister of Henry the Eighth is beginning to receive some of the attention that is his due. But for the Kingmaker, the man who for ten years was the first subject of the English Crown, and whose figure looms out with a vague grandeur even through the misty annals of the Wars of the Roses, no writer has spared a monograph. Every one, it is true, knows his name, but his personal identity is quite ungrasped. Nine persons out of ten if asked to sketch his character would find, to their own surprise, that they were falling back for their information to Lord Lytton's *Last of the Barons* or Shakespeare's *Henry the Sixth*.

An attempt, therefore, even an inadequate attempt, to trace out with accuracy his career and his habits of mind from the original authorities cannot fail to be of some use to the general reader as well as to the student of history. The result will perhaps appear meagre to those who are accustomed to the biographies of the men of later centuries. We are curiously ignorant of many of the facts that should aid us to build up a picture of the man. No trustworthy representation of his bodily form exists. The day of portraits was not yet come; his monument in Bisham Abbey has long been swept away; no writer has even deigned to describe

his personal appearance—we know not if he was dark or fair, stout or slim. At most we may gather from the vague phrases of the chroniclers, and from his quaint armed figure in the Rous Roll, that he was of great stature and breadth of limb. But perhaps the good Rous was thinking of his fame rather than his body, when he sketched the Earl in that quaint pictorial pedigree over-topping all his race save his cousin and king and enemy, Edward the Fourth.

But Warwick has only shared the fate of all his contemporaries. The men of the fifteenth century are far less well known to us than are their grandfathers or their grandsons. In the fourteenth century the chroniclers were still working on their old scale; in the sixteenth the literary spirit had descended on the whole nation, and great men and small were writing hard at history as at every other branch of knowledge. But in the days of Lancaster and York the old fountains had run dry, and the new flood of the Renaissance had not risen. The materials for reconstructing history are both scanty and hard to handle. We dare not swallow Hall and Hollingshead whole, as was the custom for two hundred years, or take their annals, coloured from end to end with Tudor sympathies, as good authority for the doings of the previous century. Yet when we have put aside their fascinating, if somewhat untrustworthy, volumes, we find ourselves wandering in a very dreary waste of fragments and scraps of history, strung together on the meagre thread of two or three dry and jejune compilations of annals. To have to take William of Worcester or good Abbot Whethamsted as the groundwork of a continuous account of the times is absolutely maddening. Hence it comes to pass that Warwick has failed to receive his dues.

Of all the men of Warwick's century there are only two whose characters we seem thoroughly to grasp—the best and the worst products of the age—Henry the Fifth and Richard the Third. The achievements of the one stirred even

the feeble writers of that day into a fulness of detail in which they indulge for no other hero; the other served as the text for so many invectives under the Tudors that we imagine that we see a real man in the gloomy portrait that is set up before us. Yet we may fairly ask whether our impression is not drawn, either at first or at second hand, almost entirely from Sir Thomas More's famous biography of the usurper, a work whose literary merits have caused it to be received as the only serious source for Richard's history. If we had not that work, Richard of Gloucester would seem a vaguely-defined monster of iniquity, as great a puzzle to the student of history as are the other shadowy forms which move on through those evil times to fall, one after the other, into the bloody grave which was the common lot of all.

In spite, however, of the dearth of good chronicles, and of the absolute non-existence of any contemporary writers of literary merit, there are authorities enough of one sort and another to make it both possible and profitable to build up a detailed picture of Warwick and his times. First and foremost, of course, come the invaluable Paston Letters, covering the whole period, and often supplying the vivid touches of detail in which the more formal documents are so lamentably deficient. If but half a dozen families, as constant in letter-writing as John and Margery Paston, had transmitted their correspondence to posterity, there would be little need to grumble at our lack of information. Other letters too exist, scattered in collections, such as the interesting scrawl from Warwick himself, in his dire extremity before Barnet fight, to Henry Vernon, which was turned up a year ago among the lumber at Belvoir Castle. Much can be gathered from rolls and inquests—for example, the all-important information as to centres and sources of local power can be traced out with perfect accuracy from the columns of the Escheats Roll, where each peer or knight's lands are carefully set forth at the moment of his

decease. Joining one authority to another, we may fairly build up the England of the fifteenth century before our eyes with some approach to completeness.

The whole picture of the times is very depressing on the moral if not on the material side. There are few more pitiful episodes in history than the whole tale of the reign of Henry the Sixth, the most unselfish and well-intentioned king that ever sat upon the English throne—a man of whom not even his enemies and oppressors could find an evil word to say; the troubles came, as they confessed, "all because of his false lords, and never of him." We feel that there must have been something wrong with the heart of a nation that could see unmoved the meek and holy King torn from wife and child, sent to wander in disguise up and down the kingdom for which he had done his poor best, and finally doomed to pine for five years a prisoner in the fortress where he had so long held his royal Court. Nor is our first impression concerning the demoralisation of England wrong. Every line that we read bears home to us more and more the fact that the nation had fallen on evil times. First and foremost among the causes of its moral deterioration was the wretched French War, a war begun in the pure spirit of greed and ambition—there was not even the poor excuse that had existed in the time of Edward the Third—carried on by the aid of hordes of debauched foreign mercenaries (after Henry the Fifth's death the native English seldom formed more than a third of any host that took the field in France), and persisted in long after it had become hopeless, partly from misplaced national pride, partly because of the personal interests of the ruling classes. Thirty-five years of a war that was as unjust as it was unfortunate had both soured and demoralised the nation. England was full of disbanded soldiers of fortune; of knights who had lost the ill-gotten lands across the Channel, where they had maintained a precarious lordship in the days of better fortune; of

castellans and governors whose occupation was gone; of hangers-on of all sorts who had once maintained themselves on the spoils of Normandy and Guienne. Year after year men and money had been lavished on the war to no effect; and when the final catastrophe came, and the fights of Formigny and Chatillon ended the chapter of our disasters, the nation began to cast about for a scapegoat on whom to lay the burden of its failures. The real blame lay on the nation itself, not on any individual; and the real fault that had been committed was not the mismanagement of an enterprise which presented any hopes of success, but a wrong-headed persistence in an attempt to conquer a country which was too strong to be held down. However, the majority of the English people chose to assume firstly that the war with France might have been conducted to a prosperous issue, and secondly that certain particular persons were responsible for its having come to the opposite conclusion. At first the unfortunate Suffolk and Somerset had the responsibility laid upon them. A little later the outcry became more bold and fixed upon the Lancastrian dynasty itself as being to blame not only for disaster abroad, but for the "want of governance" at home. If King Henry had understood the charge, and possessed the wit to answer it, he might fairly have replied that his subjects must fit the burden upon their own backs, not upon his. The war had been weakly conducted, it was true; but weakly because the men and money for it were grudged. The England that could put one hundred thousand men into the field in a civil broil at Towton sent four thousand to fight the decisive battle at Formigny that settled our fate in Normandy. At home the bulwarks of social order seemed crumbling away. Private wars, riot, open highway robbery, murder, abduction, armed resistance to the law, prevailed on a scale that had been unknown since the troublous times of Edward the Second—we might almost say since the evil days of Stephen. But it was not the Crown alone that should

have been blamed for the state of the realm. The nation had chosen to impose over-stringent constitutional checks on the kingly power before it was ripe for self-government, and the Lancastrian house sat on the throne because it had agreed to submit to those checks. If the result of the experiment was disastrous, both parties to the contract had to bear their share of the responsibility. But a nation seldom allows that it has been wrong; and Henry of Windsor had to serve as scapegoat for all the misfortunes of the realm, because Henry of Bolingbroke had committed his descendants to the unhappy compact.

Want of a strong central government was undoubtedly the complaint under which England was labouring in the middle of the fifteenth century, and all the grievances against which outcry was made were but symptoms of one latent disease.

Ever since the death of Henry the Fifth the internal government of the country had been steadily going from bad to worse. The mischief had begun in the young King's earliest years. The Council of Regency that ruled in his name had from the first proved unable to make its authority felt as a single individual ruler might have done. With the burden of the interminable French War weighing upon their backs, and the divisions caused by the quarrels of Beaufort and Gloucester dividing them into factions, the councillors had not enough attention to spare for home government. As early as 1428 we find them, when confronted by the outbreak of a private war in the north, endeavouring to patch up the quarrel by arbitration, instead of punishing the offenders on each side. Accounts of riotous assemblages in all parts of the country, of armed violence at parliamentary elections, of party fights in London at Parliament time—like that which won for the meeting of 1426 the name of the Parliament of Bats (bludgeons)—grow more and more common. We even find treasonable insurrection appearing

in the strange obscure rising of the political Lollards under Jack Sharp in 1431, an incident which shows how England was on the verge of bloodshed twenty years before the final outbreak of civil war was to take place.

But all these public troubles would have been of comparatively small importance if the heart of the nation had been sound. The phenomenon which makes the time so depressing is the terrible decay in private morals since the previous century. A steady deterioration is going on through the whole period, till at its end we find hardly a single individual in whom it is possible to interest ourselves, save an occasional Colet or Caxton, who belongs in spirit, if not date, to the oncoming renaissance of the next century. There is no class or caste in England which comes well out of the scrutiny. The Church, which had served as the conscience of the nation in better times, had become dead to spiritual things; it no longer produced either men of saintly life or learned theologians or patriotic statesmen. In its corporate capacity it had grown inertly orthodox. Destitute of any pretence of spiritual energy, yet showing a spirit of persecution such as it had never displayed in earlier centuries, its sole activity consisted in hunting to the stake the few men who displayed any symptoms of thinking for themselves in matters of religion. So great was the deadness of the Church that it was possible to fall into trouble, like Bishop Pecock, not for defending Lollardry, but for showing too much originality in attacking it. Individually the leading churchmen of the day were politicians and nothing more, nor were they as a rule politicians of the better sort; for one like Beaufort, who was at any rate consistent and steadfast, there are many Bouchiers and George Nevilles and Beauchamps, who merely sailed with the wind and intrigued for their own fortunes or those of their families.

Of the English baronage of the fifteenth century we shall have so much to say in future chapters that we need not here enlarge on its characteristics. Grown too few and too powerful, divided into a few rival groups, whose political attitude was settled by a consideration of family grudges and interests rather than by any grounds of principle, or patriotism, or loyalty, they were as unlike their ancestors of the days of John or Edward the First as their ecclesiastical contemporaries were unlike Langton or even Winchelsey. The baronage of England had often been unruly, but it had never before developed the two vices which distinguished it in the times of the Two Roses—a taste for indiscriminate bloodshed and a turn for rapid political apostasy. To put prisoners to death by torture as did Tiptoft Earl of Worcester, to desert to the enemy in the midst of battle like Lord Grey de Ruthyn at Northampton, or Stanley at Bosworth, had never before been the custom of England. It is impossible not to recognise in such traits the results of the French War. Twenty years spent in contact with French factions, and in command of the godless mercenaries who formed the bulk of the English armies, had taught our nobles lessons of cruelty and faithlessness such as they had not before imbibed. Their demoralisation had been displayed in France long ere the outbreak of civil war caused it to manifest itself at home.

But if the Church was effete and the baronage demoralised, it might have been thought that England should have found salvation in the soundheartedness of her gentry and her burgesses. Unfortunately such was not to be the case. Both of these classes were growing in strength and importance during the century, but when the times of trouble came they gave no signs of aspiring to direct the destinies of the nation. The House of Commons which should, as representing those classes, have gone on developing its privileges, was, on the contrary, thrice as important in the

reign of Henry the Fourth as in that of Edward the Fourth. The knights and squires showed on a smaller scale all of the vices of the nobility. Instead of holding together and maintaining a united loyalty to the Crown, they bound themselves by solemn sealed bonds and the reception of "liveries" each to the baron whom he preferred. This fatal system, by which the smaller landholder agreed on behalf of himself and his tenants to follow his greater neighbour in peace and war, had ruined the military system of England, and was quite as dangerous as the ancient feudalism. The salutary old usage, by which all freemen who were not tenants of a lord served under the sheriff in war, and not under the banner of any of the baronage, had long been forgotten. Now, if all the gentry of a county were bound by these voluntary indentures to serve some great lord, there was no national force in that county on which the Crown could count, for the yeoman followed the knight as the knight followed the baron. If the gentry constituted themselves the voluntary followers of the baronage, and aided their employers to keep England unhappy, the class of citizens and burgesses took a very different line of conduct. If not actively mischievous, they were sordidly inert. They refused to entangle themselves in politics at all. They submitted impassively to each ruler in turn, when they had ascertained that their own persons and property were not endangered by so doing. A town, it has been remarked, seldom or never stood a siege during the Wars of the Roses, for no town ever refused to open its gates to any commander with an adequate force who asked for entrance. If we find a few exceptions to the rule, we almost always learn that entrance was denied not by the citizens, but by some garrison of the opposite side which was already within the walls. Loyalty seems to have been as wanting among the citizens as among the barons of England. If they generally showed some slight preference for York rather than for Lancaster, it was not on any moral or sentimental

ground, but because the house of Lancaster was known by experience to be weak in enforcing "good governance," and the house of York was pledged to restore the strength of the Crown and to secure better times for trade than its rival.

Warwick was a strong man, born at the commencement of Henry the Sixth's unhappy minority, whose coming of age coincided with the outburst of national rage caused by the end of the disastrous French War, whose birth placed him at the head of one of the great factions in the nobility, whose strength of body and mind enabled him to turn that headship to full account. How he dealt with the problems which inevitable necessity laid before him we shall endeavour to relate.

CHAPTER II

THE HOUSE OF NEVILLE

Of all the great houses of mediæval England, the Nevilles of Raby were incontestably the toughest and the most prolific. From the reign of John to the reign of Elizabeth their heritage never once passed into the female line, and in all the fourteen generations which lived and died between 1210 and 1600 there was only one occasion on which the succession passed from uncle to nephew, and not from father to son or grandson. The vitality of the Neville tribe was sufficient to bear them through repeated marriages with those only daughters and heiresses whose wedlock so often forebodes the extinction of an ancient house. Of four successive heads of the family between 1250 and 1350, all married ladies who were the last representatives of old baronial houses; but the Nevilles only grew more numerous, and spread into more and more branches, extending their

possessions farther and farther from their original seat on the Durham moors till all the counties of the north were full of their manors.

The original source of the family was a certain Robert Fitz-Maldred, lord of Raby, who, in the reign of John, married Isabella de Neville, heiress of his neighbour Geoffrey de Neville of Brancepeth. Robert's son Geoffrey, who united the Teesdale lands of his father with his mother's heritage hard by the gates of Durham, took the name of Neville, and that of Fitz-Maldred was never again heard in the family. The lords of Raby did not at first distinguish themselves in any way above the rest of the barons of the North Country. We find them from time to time going forth to the King's Scotch or French wars, serving in Simon de Montfort's rebel army, wrangling with their feudal superior the Bishop of Durham, slaying an occasional sheriff, and founding an occasional chantry, and otherwise conducting themselves after the manner of their kind. It was one of the house who led the English van against the Scots at the great victory of 1346, and erected the graceful monument which gave to the battlefield the name of Neville's Cross.

Only two characteristics marked these Nevilles of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries; the largeness of their families—three successive lords of Raby boasted respectively of ten, eleven, and nine children—and their never-ending success in laying field by field and manor by manor. Robert Neville, who in the time of Henry the Third married Ida Mitford, added to his Durham lands his wife's broad Northumbrian barony in the valley of the Wansbeck. His son of the same name made Neville one of the greatest names in Yorkshire, when he wedded Mary of Middleham, and became in her right lord of Middleham Castle and all the manors dependent on it, reaching for a dozen miles along the Ure and running up to the farthest bounds of the forest of Coverdale. Robert the younger's heir, Ralph, emulated

the good fortune of his father and grandfather by securing as his wife Euphemia, heiress of Clavering, who brought him not only the half-hundred of Clavering in Essex, but the less remote and more valuable lands of Warkworth on the Northumbrian coast. Ralph's son John, though he married as his first wife a younger daughter of the house of Percy, secured as his second Elizabeth Latimer, heiress of an old baronial house whose domains lay scattered about Bucks and Bedfordshire.

Four generations of wealthy marriages had made the Nevilles the greatest lords in all the North Country. Even their neighbours, the Percies of Northumberland, were not so strong. The "saltire argent on the field gules," and the dun bull, the two Neville badges, were borne by hosts of retainers. Three hundred men-at-arms, of whom fourteen were knights and three hundred archers, followed the lord of Raby even when he went so far afield as Brittany. For home service against the Scots he could muster thrice as many. More than seventy manors were in his hands, some spread far and wide in Essex, Norfolk, Bedfordshire, and Buckinghamshire, but the great bulk of them lying massed in North Yorkshire and South Durham, around Raby and Middleham, the two strong castles which were the centres of his influence. Hence it was not surprising that King Richard the Second, when he lavished titles and honours broadcast on the nobility after his surprising *coup d'état* of 1397, should have singled out the head of the Nevilles for conciliation and preferment. Accordingly, Ralph Neville, then in the thirty-fourth year of his age, was raised to the dignity of an earl. Curiously enough, he could not be given the designation of either of the counties where the bulk of his broad lands lay. The earldom of Durham was, now as always, in the hands of its bishop, *comes palatinus* of the county since the days of William the Conqueror. The titles of York and of Richmondshire, wherein lay the other great

stretch of Neville land, were vested in members of the royal house. The Percies had twenty years before received the title of Northumberland, the third county where the Nevilles held considerable property. Hence Ralph of Raby had to be put off with the title of Westmoreland, though in that county he seems, curiously enough, not to have held a single manor. The gift of the earldom was accompanied with the more tangible present of the royal honour of Penrith.

All these favours, however, did not buy the loyalty of Ralph Neville. He was married to one of John of Gaunt's daughters by Katherine Swinford, and was at heart a strong partisan of the house of Lancaster. Accordingly, when Henry of Bolingbroke landed at Ravenspur in July 1399, Westmoreland was one of the first to join him; he rode with him to Flint, saw the surrender of King Richard, and bore the royal sceptre at the usurper's coronation at Westminster. Henry rewarded his services by making him Earl Marshal in place of the exiled Duke of Norfolk.

Earl Ralph went on in a prosperous career, aided King Henry against the rising of the Percies in 1403, and committed himself more firmly than ever to the cause of the house of Lancaster by putting down the insurrection which Scrope, Mowbray, and the aged Northumberland had raised in 1405. Twice he served King Henry as ambassador to treat with the Scots, and twice the custody of the Border was committed to him as warden. When Bolingbroke died, and Henry of Monmouth succeeded him, Earl Ralph was no less firm and faithful. At the famous Parliament of Leicester in 1414, when the glorious but fatal war with France was resolved upon, he was one of the few who withstood the arguments of Archbishop Chicheley and the appeals of the Duke of Exeter and gave their voices against the expedition. He besought the King that, if he must needs make war, he should attack Scotland rather than France, the English title to that crown being as good, the enterprise more hopeful, and the result

more likely to bring permanent profit, while—quoting an old popular rhyme—he ended by saying that

He that wolde France win, must with Scotland
first begin.

But all men cried "War! War! France! France!" The ambitious young King had his will; and the next spring there sailed from Southampton the first of those many gallant hosts of Englishmen who were to win so many fruitless battles to their country's final loss, and leave their bones behind to moulder in French soil, in the trenches of Harfleur and Orleans or on the fields of Beaugé and Patay.

Every reader of Shakespeare has met Earl Ralph in the English camp on the eve of the battle of Agincourt, remembers his downhearted wish for a few thousands of the "gentlemen of England now abed," and can repeat by heart the young King's stirring reply to his uncle's forebodings. But, in fact, Earl Ralph was not at Agincourt, nor did he even cross the sea. He had been left behind with Lord Scrope and the Baron of Greystock to keep the Scottish March, and was far away at Carlisle when Henry's little band of English were waiting for the dawn on that eventful St. Crispin's day. Unless tradition errs, it was really Walter of Hungerford who made the speech that drew down his master's chiding.

Ralph was now growing an old man as the men of the fifteenth century reckoned old age; and while the brilliant campaigns of Henry the Fifth were in progress abode at home, busied with statecraft rather than with war. But his sons, and they were a numerous tribe, were one after another sent across the seas to join their royal cousin. John, the heir of Westmoreland, was serving all through the campaigns of 1417–18, and was made governor of Verneuil and other places in its neighbourhood, after having held the trenches opposite the Porte de Normandie during the long siege of Rouen, and assisted also at the leaguer of Caen.

Ralph, Richard, William, and George are found following in their elder brother's footsteps as each of them arrived at the years of manhood, and all earned their knighthood by services done in France.

Meanwhile Earl Ralph, after surviving his royal nephew some three years, and serving for a few months as one of the Privy Council that governed in the name of the infant Henry the Sixth, died on October 21st, 1425, at the age of sixty-two, and was buried in the beautiful collegiate church which he had founded at Staindrop, hard by the gates of his ancestral castle of Raby. There his monument still remains, escaped by good fortune from the vandalism of Edwardian and Cromwellian Protestants. He lies in full armour, wearing the peaked basinet that was customary in his younger days, though it had gone out of fashion ere his death. His regular features have little trace of real portraiture, and show no signs of his advancing years, so that we may conclude that the sculptor had never been acquainted with the man he was representing. Only the short twisted moustache, curling over the mail of the Earl's camail, has something of individuality, and must have corresponded to the life; for by 1425 all the men of the younger generation were close shaven, like King Henry the Fifth. On Earl Ralph's right hand, as befitted a princess of the blood royal, lies his second wife Joan of Beaufort; on his left Margaret Stafford, the bride of his youth and the mother of his heir.

CHAPTER III

RICHARD OF SALISBURY

Earl Ralph, surpassing all his keen and prolific ancestors not only in the success with which he pushed his fortunes, but in

the enormous family which he reared, had become the father of no less than twenty-three children by his two wives. Nine were the offspring of Margaret of Stafford, fourteen of Joan of Beaufort. John, the heir of Westmoreland, had died a few years before his father, and the earldom passed to his son, Ralph the second, now a lad of about eighteen. But the greater number of the other twenty-two children still survived, and their fortunes influenced the after history both of the house of Neville and the kingdom of England to such an extent that they need careful statement.

The old Earl had turned all his energies into negotiating the marriages of his children, and partly by the favour of the two Henries, partly by judicious buying up of wardships in accordance with the practice of the fifteenth century, partly by playing on the desire of his neighbours to be allied to the greatest house of the North Country, he had succeeded in establishing a compact family group, which was already by 1425 one of the factors to be reckoned with in English politics. The most important of these connections by far was the wedding of his youngest daughter Cecily to Richard Duke of York—a marriage brought about by royal favour shortly before the Earl's death, while both the contracting parties were mere children; the Duke some eleven years old, the little bride about nine.^[1] By this union Ralph of Westmoreland was destined to become the ancestor of a score of kings and queens of England. It bound the house of Neville to the Yorkist cause, and led away the children of Ralph from that loyalty to Lancaster which had been the cause of their father's greatness. But at the time when the marriage was brought about no one could well have foreseen the Wars of the Roses, and we may acquit the Earl of any design greater than that of increasing the prosperity of his house by another marriage with a younger branch of the royal stock. His own union with Joan of Beaufort had served him so well, that he could desire nothing better for

the next generation. The elder brothers and sisters of Cecily of York, if their alliances were less exalted than hers, were yet wedded, almost without exception, to the most important members of the baronage.

Of the elder family, the offspring of Earl Ralph by Margaret of Stafford, the second son Ralph Neville of Biwell married the co-heiress of Ferrers. One sister died young, another became a nun, but four of the remaining five were married to the heirs of the houses of Mauley, Dacre, Scrope of Bolton, and Kyme. The younger family, the children of Joan of Beaufort, made even more fortunate marriages. Of the daughters, the youngest, as we have stated above, wedded Richard of York. Her elder sisters were united respectively to John Mowbray Duke of Norfolk, Humphrey Stafford Duke of Buckingham, and Henry Percy Earl of Northumberland—the grandson of Earl Ralph's old enemy and the son of Hotspur. Of the six sons of Joan of Beaufort, Richard the eldest married Alice Montacute, heiress of the earldom of Salisbury, and became by her the father of the Kingmaker; with him we shall have much to do. William, the second son, won the heiress of Fauconbridge. George, the third son, was made the heir of his half-uncle John Lord Latimer, and by special grant succeeded to his uncle's barony. Robert entered the Church, and by judicious family backing became Bishop of Salisbury before he had reached his twenty-fifth year, only to be transplanted ten years later to Durham, the most powerful of the English bishoprics, whose palatine rights he could thus turn to the use of his numerous kindred. Finally, Edward, the youngest brother, secured Elizabeth Beauchamp, heiress of Abergavenny.

The numbers of the English baronage had been rapidly decreasing since the reign of the third Edward, and in the early years of Henry the Sixth the total number of peers summoned to a Parliament never exceeded thirty-five. Among this small muster could be counted one grandson,

three sons, and five sons-in-law of Earl Ralph.^[2] A little later, one son and one grandson more were added to the peers of the Neville kindred, and it seemed probable that by the marriages of the next generation half the English House of Lords would be found to descend from the prolific stock of Raby.

In the first twenty years of the reign of Henry of Windsor, while the young King's personal weakness was not yet known, while his uncle of Bedford and his great-uncle of Winchester stood beside the throne, and while the war in France—though the balance had long turned against England—was still far from its disastrous end, the confederacies of the great baronial houses were of comparatively little importance. The fatal question of the succession to the Crown was still asleep, for the young King was only just nearing manhood, and might, for all that men knew, be the parent of as many war-like sons as his grandfather. It was not till Henry's nine years of barren wedlock, from 1445 to 1454, set the minds of his nobles running on the problem of the succession, that the peace of England was really endangered.

Richard Neville, the eldest of the sons of Earl Ralph's second marriage, was born in 1399. He was too young to follow King Henry to the siege of Harfleur and the fight of Agincourt, but a few years later he accompanied his half-brother John, the heir of Westmoreland, to the wars of France. It was not in France, however, that the years of his early manhood were to be spent, but on the Scotch Border in the company of his father. When he came of age and was knighted in 1420 he was made the colleague of the old Earl in the wardenship of the Western Marches. This office he retained for several years, and was in consequence much mixed up with Scotch affairs, twice acting as commissioner to treat with the Regent of Scotland, and escorting James the First to the border of his kingdom when the English