INTERESTING NARRATIVE

of the

HISTORY

of the

PEOPLE OF ENGLAND

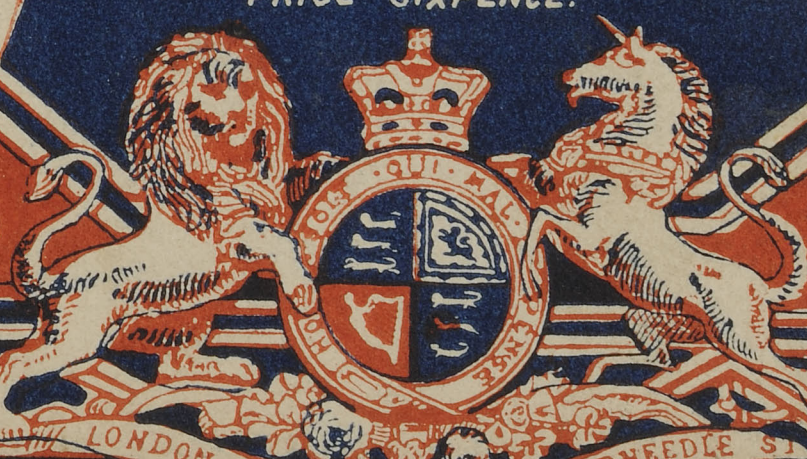
IN

THE MIDDLE AGES.

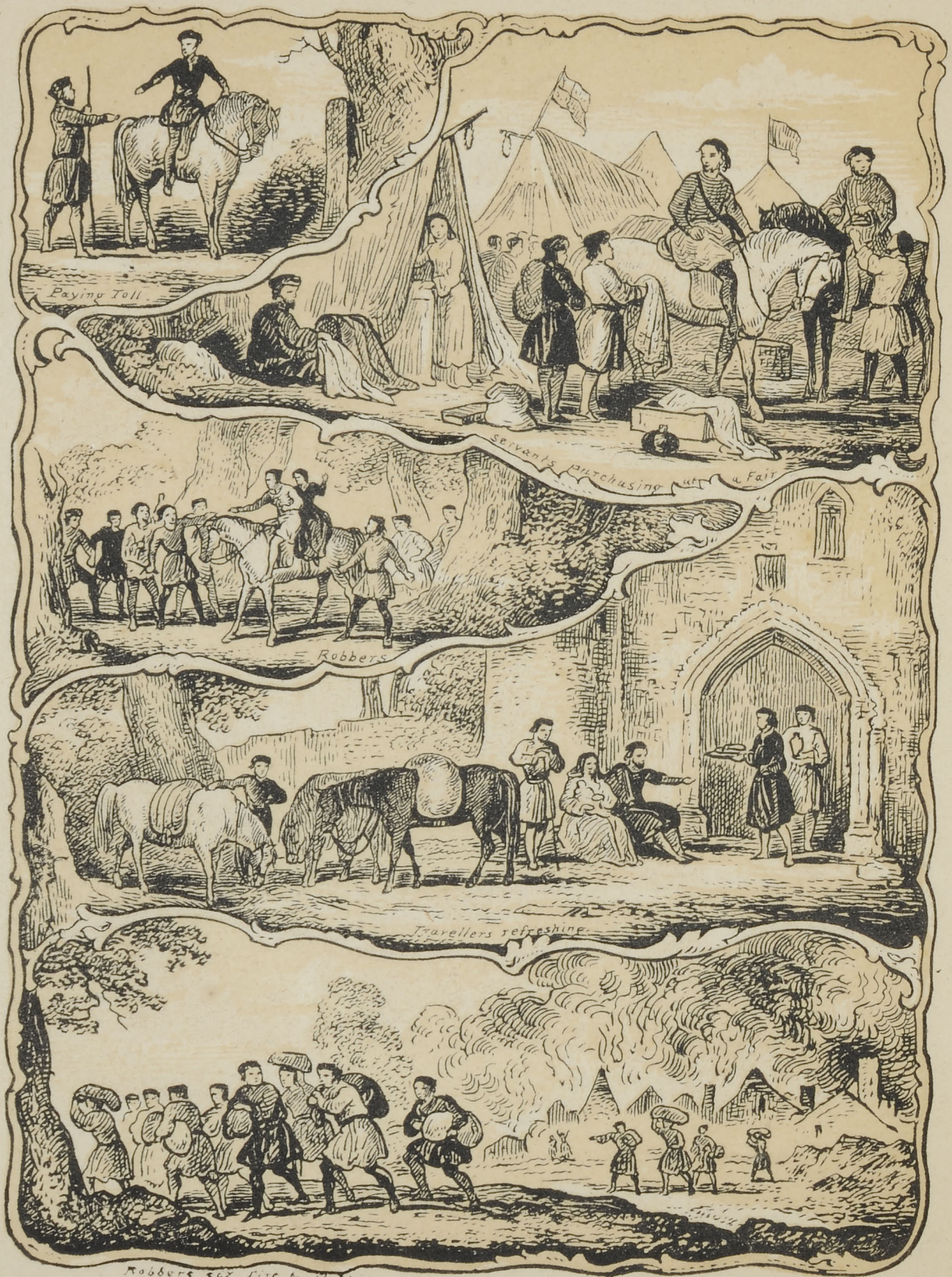
For Young Children.

BY MISS CORNER.

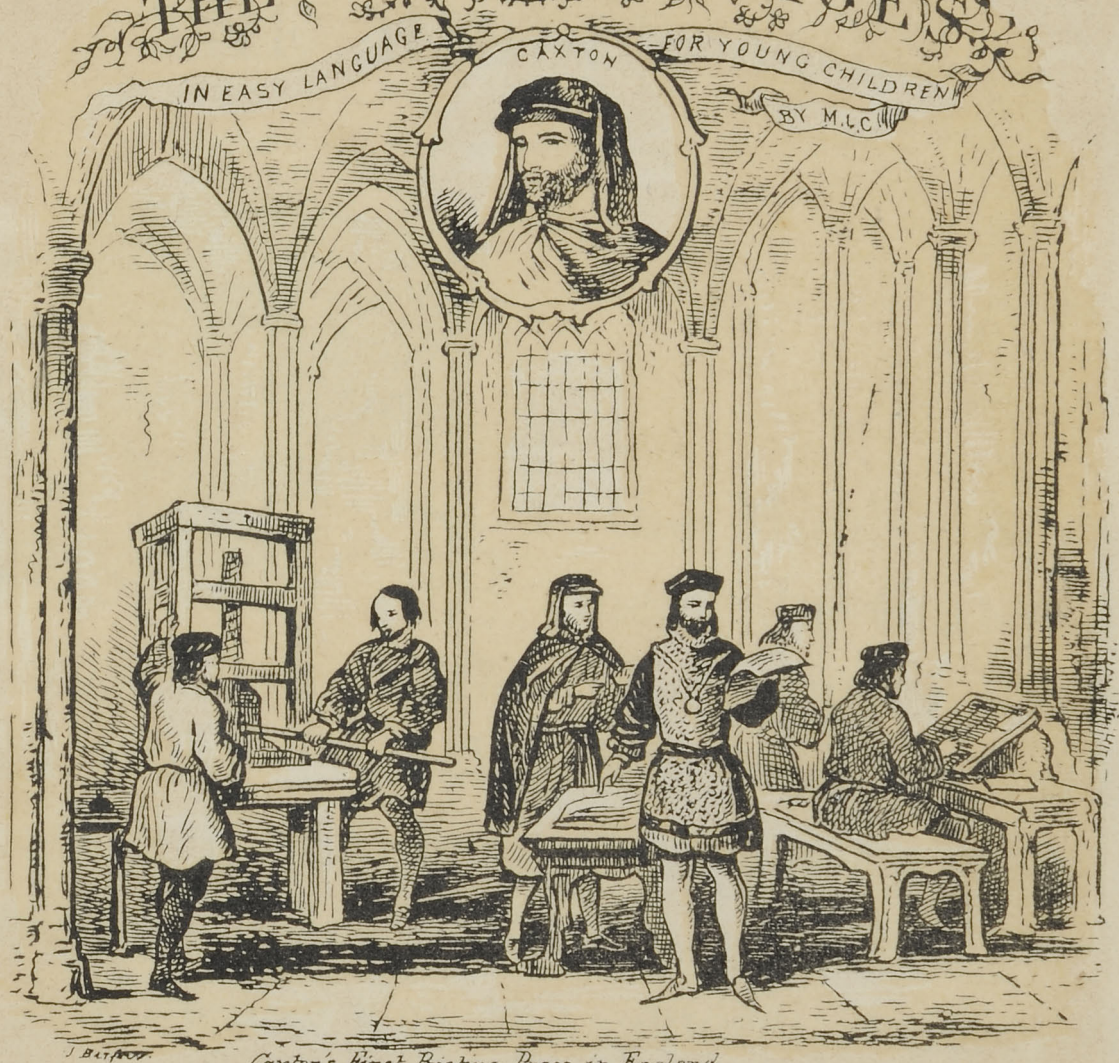
PRICE SIXPENCE.



LONDON DEAN AND SON THREADNEEDLE ST


Paying Toll
Servants purchasing at a Fair
Robbers
Travellers refreshing
Robbers set fire to Boston

ENGLAND
DURING
THE MIDDLE AGES
IN EASY LANGUAGE FOR YOUNG CHILDREN
BY M.L.C.



Caxton's First Printing Press in England

LONDON
THOMAS DEAN AND SON
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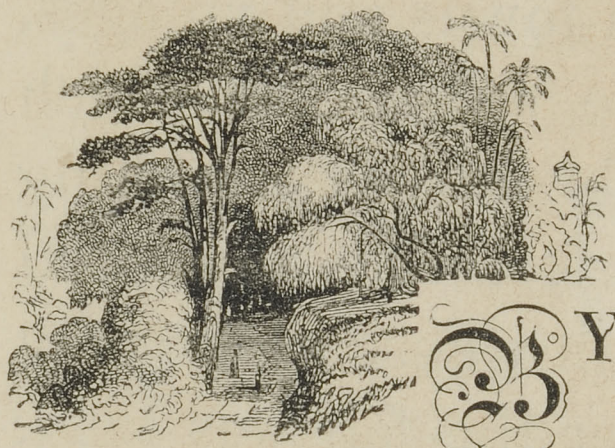
ENGLAND

DURING

THE MIDDLE AGES.



BY the Middle Ages I mean the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries, during which the Feudal system was gradually abolished, and slavery ceased to exist, in England.

And what was the general state of the country during that period? The chief towns, now so large and handsome, were but small poor places, the streets not

SECOND EDITION.

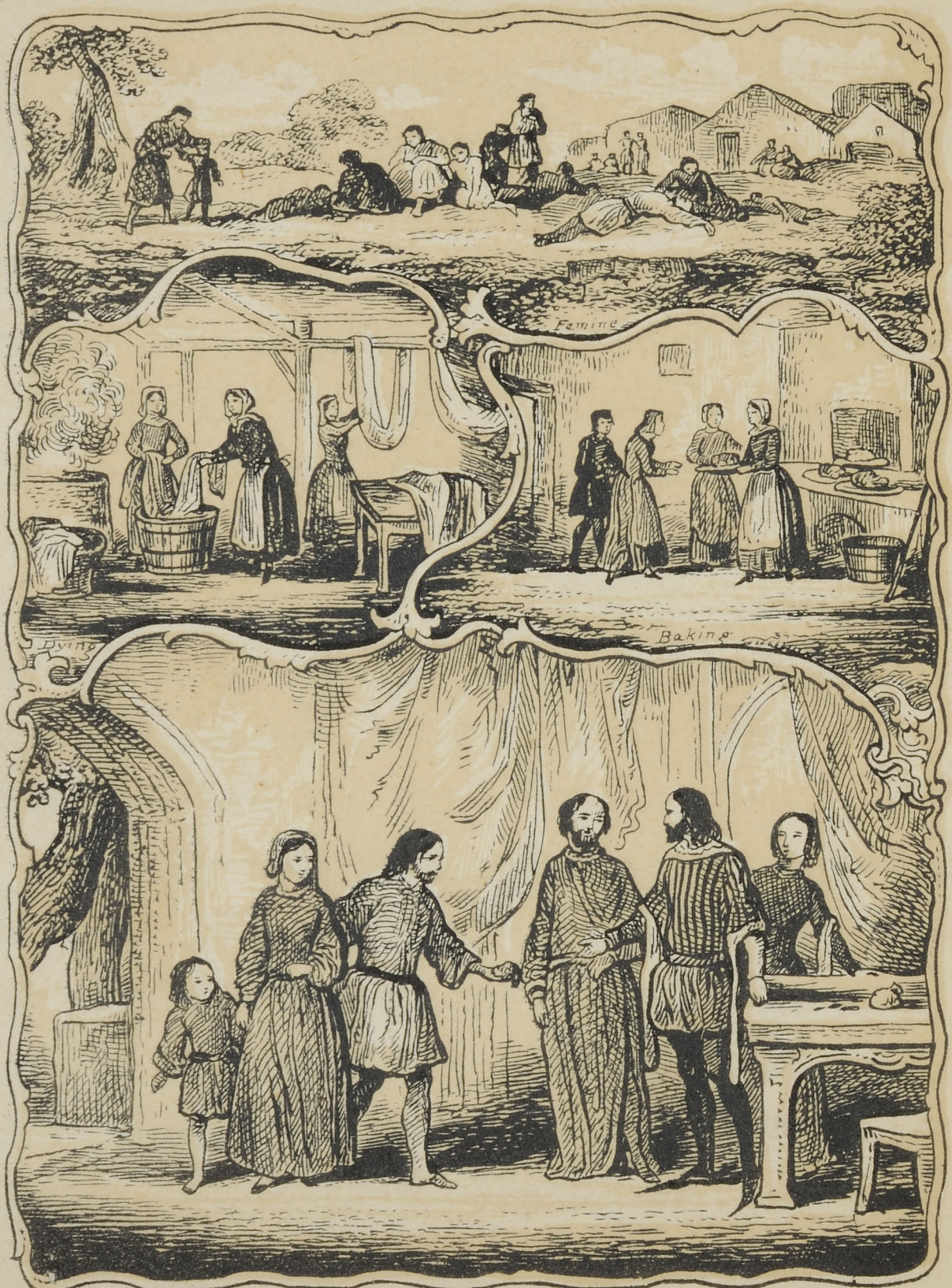
paved, the houses little better than wooden sheds, and no shops except the workshops of blacksmiths, carpenters, curriers, and others of a similar description. Provisions, and all things for daily use, were bought at the weekly markets; and at all the principal places, both towns and villages, a fair was held once a year, to which goods were brought for sale by travelling merchants, who were forced to pay a toll to every baron through whose estate they passed; and, wherever the fair was held, the Lord of the Manor exacted a duty on every article sold there. The shops, or rather stalls of the merchants, were ranged in long rows, like streets; nor were there any other kind of shops, even in London, at that time; for the retail dealers did not sell goods at their houses, but in a sort of market-place, called the Chepe,

which stood on the spot now occupied by East-cheap and Cheapside. Some of the fairs lasted fifteen days.

The poor country folks looked forward to the fair-time with great delight; and families of higher rank went there, or sent a trusty person, called a factor, to buy silks, fine cloth, ornaments, spices, and a variety of things they had no other opportunities of obtaining; for many of them never saw London, or any other large town, in the course of their lives, as a journey in those days was a very perilous undertaking. The forests and highways were infested with robbers, and there were no inns, nor any public conveyances on the roads, which were not such roads as we have now, but like the worst of our cross country lanes, bad and lonely. Then there was no mode of

travelling but on horseback, and in many of the towns no accommodation to be had, so that the few persons who did travel used to stop at some castle, or monastery, where they were always entertained with hospitality, according to the notions of those times; that is, they were supplied with coarse bread, and meat, and porridge, and some straw to sleep upon. If, however, the traveller was of high rank, he was received by the Lord of the Castle, or the Abbot of the monastery, and treated as a friend.

Robbery was so common in the reigns of John and Henry the Third, that the next king, Edward the First, appointed justices of the peace, and ordered that there should be watchmen, at night, in every city. Many men, were, perhaps, driven to adopt a wicked course of life



Bondsman purchasing his freedom.

by the ill-treatment of the Normans, and the want of employment; for there were no manufacturers of any consequence to give employment to the labouring poor, whose numbers were always increasing; nor were there so many workmen wanted for building and other arts, until the towns came to be enlarged and improved.

Famines were frequent both in England and Scotland during those times; and it was after a dreadful scarcity of food in the time of Edward the Third, that the rate of wages was fixed by law. A master carpenter was paid three-pence a day, a labourer two-pence, or one-third less, with meat and drink. The wages of the agricultural labourers were about the same; but two-pence would then buy more than enough bread and meat, and ale, for the day's provision of a whole

family. The lower orders could generally get more meat than they can now, but less bread, and no wholesome vegetables; for none were then cultivated in England. Their food, therefore, consisted of poor unfatted meat, coarse brown bread, and ale.

All this while the condition of the lower orders was undergoing a change. The nobles were constantly giving freedom to their serfs and villeins; some because they thought it a Christian duty, but many more because they wanted money, and so permitted their bondsmen to purchase their liberty, and the liberty of their wives and children. Most of these freedmen settled in various towns, as artizans, and thus the number of free citizens was continually increasing. Then the Commons, as those people were called who were not of noble birth, began to rise to some importance in

the country. In the reign of Henry the Third, they were first allowed to send members to Parliament; and although it was a long time before those members were suffered to take a part in making the laws, yet some of them ventured to represent the grievances of the people to their rulers; and this was the beginning of our House of Commons. At first, every householder that paid rates and taxes, had a right to vote at the election of members of parliament; but in the time of Henry the Sixth, the elective franchise, or right of voting, was limited to those who had freehold property to the value of forty shillings a year,—equal to twenty pounds of our money.

In the reign of Richard the Second, there was a terrible insurrection among the working classes, usually called Wat

Tyler's rebellion, because it was headed by a man of that name. It was occasioned by an annual tax of a shilling a head for every member of a family above the age of fifteen; and the poor people thought it unjust that they should have to pay as much as the rich land-owners, as it fell hard on those who had large families. Therefore they resolved to demand that this oppressive tax should be abolished, and certain rights granted to them that were then enjoyed by the higher classes. They desired that slavery should be entirely abolished; that trade should be free, that is, that no tolls or duties should be paid on goods sold at the fairs and markets; and that the villeins should pay a fixed rent for their land, instead of rendering feudal services to their lords.

Thousands of men marched to London

in a riotous manner, and were met by the king and the city magistrates in Smithfield; when the king promised to grant their demands, and to pardon the rioters; but no sooner had they dispersed, and returned to their homes, than he broke his word, and caused great numbers of them to be seized, and hanged on the nearest trees, without even a trial.

It was in this reign that Whittington was Lord Mayor of London. You have, no doubt, read the story of Whittington and his Cat, but perhaps you do not know that the real Whittington never was a poor boy, but was the son of a knight, and a great coal merchant. It was about this time that coals were beginning to be generally used for firing, instead of wood, and the coal mines in the north of England to be extensively worked.

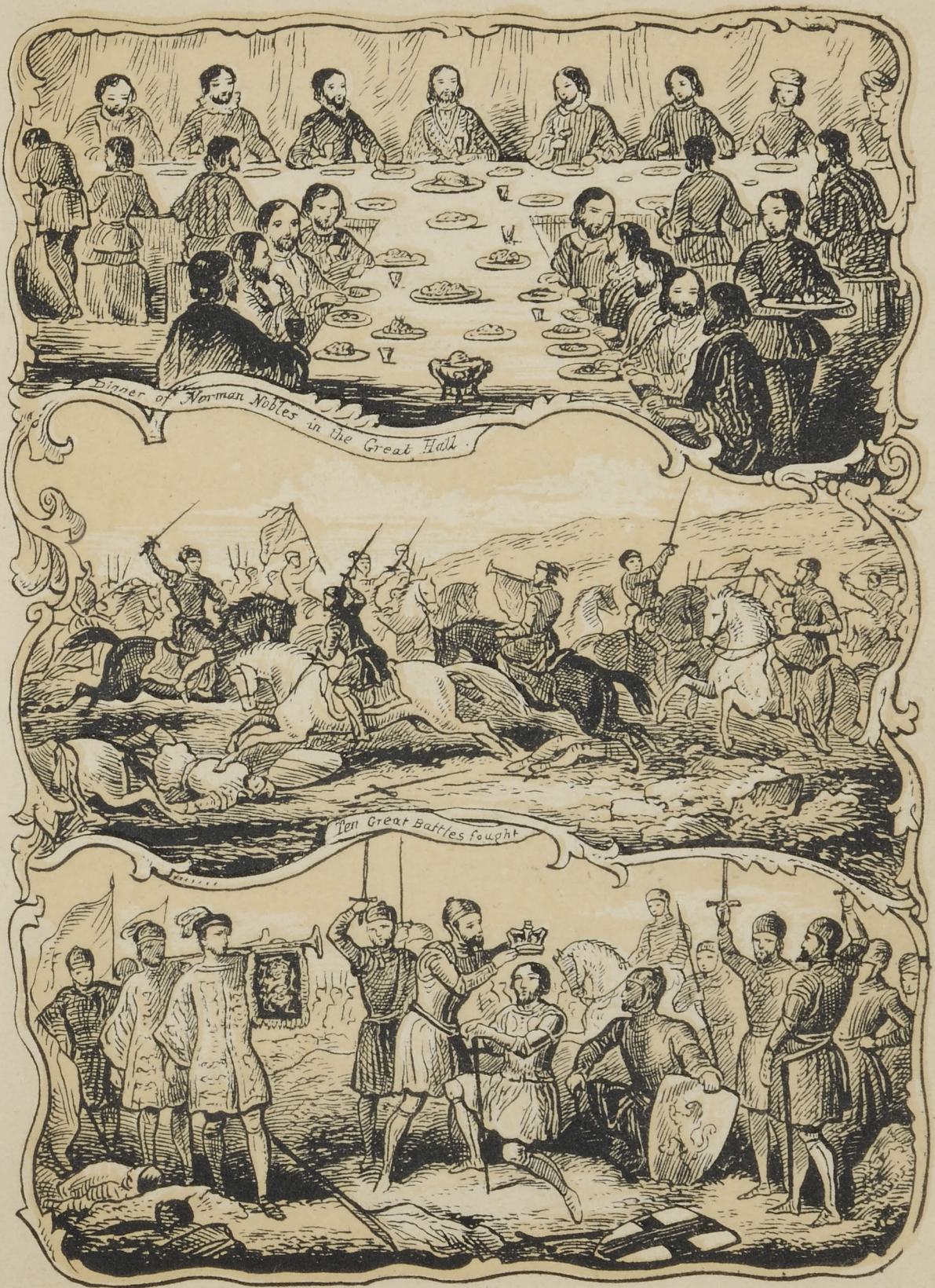
The great land-owners still lived in castles, or in large rudely built mansions, surrounded by a broad moat, or ditch. They had their marshals, stewards, heralds, trumpeters, and other officers, who wore their lord's livery, and often oppressed and ill-treated his peasantry and lower dependants, who were not privileged to wear it. Priests and choristers formed part of every great household; and in the castle was always a chapel, where cathedral service was daily performed. The dinner was served at ten o'clock in the forenoon, in the great hall, where the lord of the castle took his place at an upper table, with the ladies and visitors of high rank; while a numerous host of retainers, with guests of less distinction, sat at a lower table. The difference of rank was always shown by a large salt cellar,

the superiors sitting above the salt, and the inferiors below it; and this custom was continued down to a late period in country mansions. The fare was plentiful, but served in a rough way, in great wooden dishes, placed on the oak tables without table cloths. The plates were also of wood, and called platters; knives were used, but as forks were not invented, people used their fingers instead. It was usual to hire rope dancers, jugglers, and minstrels, to amuse the company; and every great man kept a jester, whose office was to say funny things, to make people laugh. Some of the best apartments of very rich people, at this period, were hung with tapestry, and painted glass windows were becoming more general in the dwellings of the great; but these luxuries were still very rare, nor did they become com-

mon till after the civil wars between the houses of York and Lancaster.

These wars were begun in the reign of Henry the Sixth, in consequence of a claim made to the crown, by Richard, Duke of York, who contended that he, and not the King, was the true heir to the throne. Each had his partizans, and a war broke out, which lasted for many years, and caused a great deal of misery in the country. It was called the War of the Roses, because the friends of each party were known by wearing a white or a red rose, as a badge.

Very few of the barons had now any vassals remaining on their lands, but they enlisted in their service as many of the knights and common people as they could support, so that every nobleman raised an army of his own. Many men took up


Dinner of Norman Nobles in the Great Hall
Ten Great Battles fought
Henry VII. crowned on Bosworth field

arms, not because they cared who was king, but because they were fed well in the castles of their chiefs. It is said that the famous Earl of Warwick had thirty thousand retainers in his different castles, who lived entirely at his expense, which was no trifle, if it be true, as we are told, that six oxen were killed every morning to breakfast the people at his town house, in Warwick-lane, London.

Ten great battles were fought in the course of sixteen years in various parts of the kingdom; and many of the chief nobility, with thousands of the people, fell in this unhappy contest. The Duke of York himself was killed at the battle of Wakefield, in Yorkshire, but his son carried on the war, and at length gained possession of the throne. This was Edward the Fourth.

During these wars, many of the old Norman Castles were destroyed; and we hear no more of knights of chivalry, and their warlike sports, as described in the History of the Feudal Times.

And now let us turn from warfare to a more pleasing subject. In the reign of Edward the Fourth, the art of printing was brought into England from Germany. This wonderful invention made a great change all over the world; for when books could be more readily obtained, people began to read and gain knowledge. For a long time, however, it was only among the higher classes, in England, that learning made any progress, so that people of the middle ranks were still unable to read and write.

In the next reign, that of Richard the Third, a post was first established in Eng-

land, but it was only to carry government letters, or dispatches.

The usual dress of the middle classes, in those times, consisted of a close coat, tight pantaloons, short boots, and a cloth cap. The coat was like that now worn by our blue-coat boys, with a leather belt round the waist, in which every one carried a knife to cut his meat. Noblemen wore embroidered jackets, with short mantles of satin or velvet, and velvet caps. The clothing of the country people was made of coarse wool, woven generally at home; and its texture was similar to our blankets.

Richard the Third was an usurper, that is, he had no right to be king, and the civil war was resumed for the purpose of placing on the throne Henry, Earl of Richmond, who was heir of the House

of Lancaster. A battle was fought at Bosworth, in 1485, when Richard was killed, and his rival proclaimed king, by the title of Henry the Seventh. He married the princess Elizabeth, a very amiable lady, who was the daughter of Edward the Fourth, and heiress of the House of York; so that the two families, whose quarrels for the throne had caused so much bloodshed, were thus united, and peace restored.

This happy event was followed by great changes in the state of society, as you will find on reading the next part of this book, which will tell you all about the manners and condition of the people of

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