HENRY VII TUDOR

(1457-1509)

King Henry VII, often called Henry Tudor, ruled over England from 1485 to 1509. Henry was born on 28 January 1457, in Pembroke Castle, Pembrokeshire. He was the son of Edmund Tudor, Earl of Richmond, and Margaret Beaufort, Countess of Richmond and Derby. His mother was a direct descendant of John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, and Henry was his great-great-grandson, and great-great-great-grandson of King Edward III. Margaret, however, descended from John of Gaunt's illegitimate child, and her son had very feeble claim to the throne of England. On his father's side Henry descended from an unauthorised liaison between Henry V's widowed French queen, Catherine of Valois, and a Welsh esquire, Owen Tudor.

Henry, a Lancastrian, was bom during the Wars of the Roses. After the collapse of the Lancastrian cause in 1471, when the Yorkist Icing Edward IV seized the throne from the Lancastrian King Henry VI, Henry Tudor had to go into exile, and took refuge in Brittany. On the death of King Henry VI Henry Tudor became head of the house of Lancaster. Supported by the French king, Henry raised an army from the French mercenaries and the remnants of the Lancastrian army, and invaded England in the summer of 1485.

Henry became king after Richard III was slain in the battle at Bosworth Field. Legend has it that one of Henry's men found Richard's crown hanging from a hawthorn bush, and gave it to Henry, Earl of Richmond, who thus became king of England. In autumn he was crowned King Henry VII in London.

Henry VII had a lot of problems to decide. He was always to keep in mind that there were men who had far better rights to the throne than he did. In 1485, when he became king, Henry VII had the only real rival for the throne, the ten-year old Edward, Earl of Warwick, son of the Duke of Clarence, whose claim was transmitted exclusively through the male line. Henry eliminated his young Yorkist rival by imprisonment. In 1499, however, he had him executed.

Another potential troublemaker was Princess Elizabeth of York, daughter of King Edward IV. A year later Henry married the Yorkist heiress. This marriage was of great political importance. It meant the union of the red rose of the house of Lancaster with the white rose of the house of York. The marriage, as well as the whole reign of this first ruler of the house of Tudor in general, put an end to a long period of national disunity known as the Wars of the Roses. Still many of the Yorkists were greatly displeased with the Lancastrian victory. Yorkist plots continued to threaten Henry VII's position for most part of his reign. One of the Yorkist uprisings took place in 1487. It was led by Lambert Simnel, an English impostor, who claimed to be Edward, Earl of Warwick, while the real Earl of Warwick was actually imprisoned by Henry in the Tower of London at the time.

Simnel was the son of a baker. A priest named William Symonds made the thirteen-year old boy declare himself Edward Plantagenet. The Yorkists had the boy crowned in Dublin. When the rebel forces landed in England, they found no support there. Nobody believed Simnel to be Earl of Warwick. A few weeks later Henry VII captured the impostor at the Battle of Stoke, outside Newark. The false Earl of Warwick was too young to be punished, and King Henry was generous enough to pardon him. The boy was put to work in the palace kitchen.

Another Yorkist revolt was led by Perkin Warbeck, who pretended to be Richard, Duke of York, the younger of King Edward IV's sons. He stated that he had escaped from the Tower. Warbeck was supported by King James IV of Scotland, as well as by King Edward IV's sister Margaret, Duchess of Burgundy, who acknow­ledged the pretender as her nephew. This support permitted Warbeck to raise an army and invade south-west England in 1498. His forces were defeated. Warbeck was captured and, following two attempts to escape from the Tower, was hanged.

In his later years King Henry VII grew less popular, but he remained shrewd and hard- working. In 1494 he re-established English control in Ireland. He stimulated the development of overseas trade, especially with the Flemings, who were eager to buy English wool for their cloth industry. King Henry managed to maintain peaceful relations with Scotland, Austria, Spain, and France throughout most of his years as king. In 1501 Henry's elder son, Prince Arthur, was married to Catherine of Aragon, the daughter of Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain. In 1502 Arthur's sister Margaret was married to James IV of Scotland.

Henry VII also strengthened the royal power over the nobles. This king became the greatest, most powerful and most important person in the land. He brought honour and respect to the man who wore the crown of England. When King Henry died in Richmond, Surrey, on 21 April 1509, there was no opposition to his son who succeeded him as King Henry VIII.