

# **HISTORIC ERAS AND PARAGRAPHIC PENCILINGS**

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Historic Eras and Paragraphic Pencilings by W. J. Scott

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# HISTORIC ERAS

AND

## PARAGRAPHIC PENCILINGS.

W. J. SCOTT, D.D.,

NORTH GEORGIA CONFERENCE.

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1892.

## PREFACE.

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This volume contains a part only of the literary work of the last two years.

It is gratefully inscribed to friends both new and old—whose steadfast loyalty has been an inspiration to

THE AUTHOR.

January 1st, 1892.

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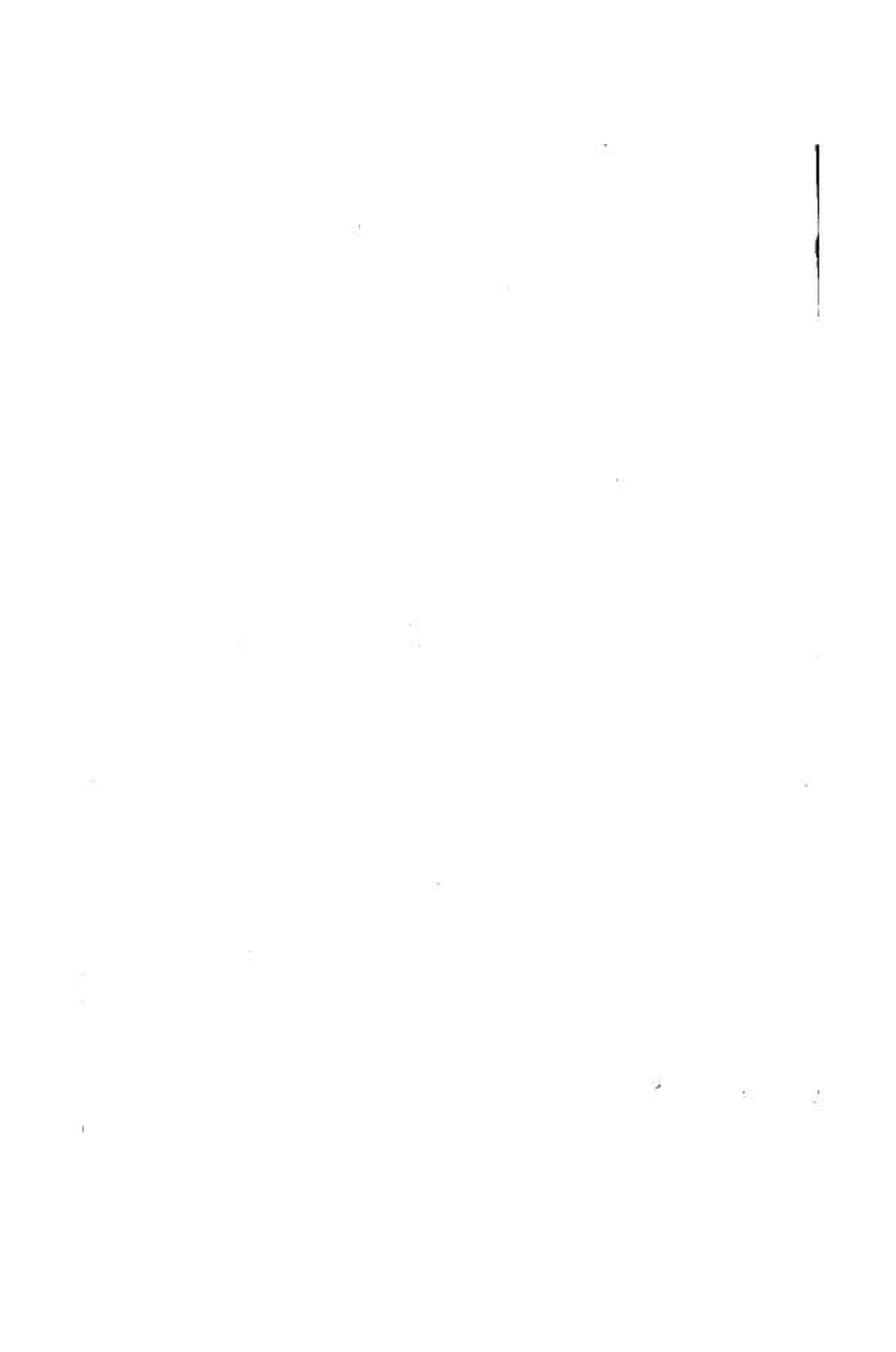
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## HISTORIC ERAS.





## THE STORY OF MAGNA CHARTA.

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"England is the freest country in the world.—*Montesquieu.*"

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It is a singular fact that Henry Hallam, in the main an astute and learned historian, should have commenced his "Constitutional History of England" with the accession of Henry VII. It is as though Von Holst, or whoever else should undertake a constitutional history of the American government, should utterly ignore the administration of Jefferson and the "era of good feeling" under the presidency of Monroe, and begin with the fatuous and fateful administration of Abraham Lincoln. For while it is true that Henry VII., by his victory on Bosworth field and his intermarriage with Elizabeth of York, united in his own person the rival claims of York and Lancaster, yet the Tudor dynasty that he founded was in many respects the most arbitrary known to English history.

Indeed, the formative period of the British Constitution begins with the reign of Henry I., the youngest son of the Conqueror, and culminates in the reign of Edward III., of the house of York. Then it was that Parliament became a two-chambered legislative body, composed of Lords and Commons, the former consist-

ing of the peers, temporal and spiritual, and the latter of the knights of the shire and the burgesses.

If, however, we would rightly understand the story of the *Magna Charta*, we must needs go back to the era of the Norman conquest. That conquest involved the thorough subjugation of the Anglo-Saxon people. They were utterly impoverished by wholesale confiscation. The records of the domesday-book show that in the aggregate not less than six hundred baronies and sixty thousand knightly fees were distributed among the followers of William of Normandy. Besides this impoverishment, there was both political and ecclesiastical disfranchisement. For one hundred years after the decisive battle of Hastings no man of English blood and birth was admitted to the ranks of the nobility. In the Church they were equally discounted by their Norman masters. The prelates and other higher clergy were either born in foreign parts or descendants of those who came over with the Conqueror. The first notable break in this record of Saxon disqualification was made by Henry II. in his nomination of Thomas Becket for the see of Canterbury. The fact that Becket was born on English soil, although of Norman lineage, may have had somewhat to do with his subsequent brutal assassination by a party of Norman gentry.

Beyond all else, however, was the thorough social degradation of the Saxons. Macaulay tells us that during several reigns a Norman could kick an English man with impunity and at will. In a word, they were a despised and downtrodden race.