

**HENRY
THE SEVENTH**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649169429

Henry the Seventh by James Gairdner

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JAMES GAIRDNER

**HENRY
THE SEVENTH**

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HENRY THE SEVENTH



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BY

JAMES GAIRDNER



MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED
ST. MARTIN'S STREET, LONDON

1909

First Edition printed 1889
Reprinted 1892, 1895, 1902, 1906, 1909

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CHAPTER I

EARLY LIFE

NEVER was king so thoroughly disciplined by adversity before he came to the throne as was King Henry VII. Without a father even from his birth, driven abroad in his childhood owing to the attainder of his family, more than once nearly delivered up to his enemies and owing life and liberty to his own and his friends' astuteness, his ultimate conquest of the Crown was scarcely so much a triumph of ambition as the achievement of personal safety. He could not help his birth, and in spite of the imperfections in his title he could not help being regarded as head of the House of Lancaster after Henry VI. and his son had been cut off. He could not help, in short, being an object of suspicion and jealousy to Edward IV. and Richard III. successively, even if he had made no effort to dispossess them of the throne; and, in truth, against Edward he seems to have done nothing for his own part, though the Earl of Oxford's expedition to St. Michael's Mount must have been with a view to advance his claims. He might, indeed, for anything we know to the contrary, have remained an exile and a refugee to the end of his days, had not the tyranny of Richard III. drawn towards

him the sympathies of Englishmen in a way they were not drawn towards him during Edward's reign.

It was through his mother that he derived his claim to the Crown ; for though his father traced his descent from Cadwallader, and the Welsh were pleased with his pedigree, it was only spoken of when he came to the throne as conferring some additional lustre on his title. Nor could the fact that his paternal grandfather, Sir Owen Tudor, a simple knight of Wales, was bold enough to marry the widow of Henry V., daughter to Charles VI. of France, in any way advance his pretensions, though it made his father a half-brother to Henry VI. and allied him besides with the royal family of France. But standing as he did in such close relations with the king, Edmund Tudor, the son of Sir Owen by the Queen-dowager Katharine, was raised by Henry VI. to the dignity of Earl of Richmond ; and the title of course descended to Henry, who was his only son. This was all that he could claim by right of his father.

But his mother, Margaret Beaufort, only daughter of John Beaufort, Duke of Somerset, was the lineal heiress of John of Gaunt. It is true that her grandfather, John de Beaufort, was only a natural son, born before his father's, John of Gaunt's, marriage with his mother, Katharine Swynford. But the Beauforts had been legitimated by Act of Parliament in the reign of Richard II., and though a reservation of the royal dignity was introduced into the patent when it was confirmed by Henry IV., it is now well known that there was no such exception in the original grant or in the Act of Parliament of Richard II.'s time. So that, failing the issue of John of Gaunt by his two previous marriages, his de-

scendants by Katharine Swynford, even by sons whom she bore him before marriage, were the true representatives of the House of Lancaster, and could claim the throne itself if that House had any claim to it at all.

It is by no means certain, however, that Henry knew he had this advantage, and the silence of the Act of Parliament declaring his right to the Crown, as to its true hereditary character, seems rather to imply that the ground was not thought safe. No doubt there was another reason for reticence in the fact that the assertion of Henry's own hereditary claim would have discredited that of his wife as heiress of the House of York, and alienated his Yorkist supporters. But it seems probable, in the nature of things, that the reservation inserted by Henry IV. in the original patent of Richard II. was regarded as a true legal obstacle which it was better simply to ignore than expressly to overrule it in the parliamentary confirmation of Henry's title.

Such, then, was the nature of Henry's ancestral claims. We come now to his personal history. He was born at Pembroke Castle on the feast of St. Agnes the Second (28th January) 1457. In after years, when he was king, his mother dated a letter to him, "At Calais town thys day of Seynt Annes, that y dyd bryng ynto thys world my good and gracyous prynce, kyng and only beloved son." *St. Anne's* day falls in July; but we have ample evidence that Henry was born in the beginning of the year, and that "Seynt Annes" means St. Agnes. The circumstances of his birth were peculiar. His father was already more than two months dead, and his mother, incredible as the fact may seem, was only fourteen years old—in fact, had not quite completed her