

MERCHANT PRINCES.

It is not every wealthy person that is satisfied, like the President Jeannin, with being the son of his own merit, or that with Lord Thurlow would sooner acknowledge his ancestor in a drayman than a courtier.

It must be from this weakness of mind, that although England is more indebted to commerce for her greatness than any other nation in the world, it is thought, by too many, a mark of good breeding, to undervalue and sneer at the name of merchant, as if it were derogatory to rank or dignity. The circumstance is the more singular, as a considerable number of British peers, and those too of the highest rank, are immediately descended from London merchants, and the foundation of the fortunes of many others has been laid in commerce; so much so, indeed, that a great portion of the British peerage is related, either by descent or intermarriage, to the citizens of London. This is the case with at least four English dukes, as many marquesses, and a whole host of earls, viscounts, and barons.

Even as early as the reign of Athelstan, who resided in the heart of London, at a place which still retains his name (for from Athelstan, or Adlestan, the name of Adde-street, called in an ancient record *King Adde-street*, is derived), a merchant, who had made three foreign voyages on his own account, became entitled to the quality and privileges of a thane, or nobleman; and we find accordingly, that in the wittenagemot which sanctioned Harold's usurpation of the throne, the *seamen or merchants* of London are enumerated among the thanes who were present.

When the Normans displaced the Saxons in the dominion of England, they substituted the appellation of *Baron* for that of *Thane*; but a baron, with them, meant any freeman born of free parentage, and of course the citizens of London were not the only barons of the Norman line, for there were the barons of the Cinque Ports, the barons of Warwick, &c.—The title of Baron as applicable to commoners is now confined, and in parliamentary phrase merely, to the representatives of London and of the Cinque Ports. It has been selected, however, as the distinguishing appellation of a large and eminent branch of the British peerage; and it is to be hoped that they will never forget that the style and title on which they justly pride themselves, was once a style and title common to every liveryman of London.—Although the citizens of London have thus, and for all good purposes happily, lost the claim to nobility, which in early times was the certain

reward of successful commerce; yet the peerage as well as baronetage of England exhibits numerous proofs of the voluntary respect paid to commerce by British sovereigns, in elevating those who pursued it to the highest titles of the state.

The noble house of Osborne, which has attained the first rank of a subject, does not disdain to acknowledge, that the founder of the family, Edward Osborne, was an apprentice to Sir William Hewet, a merchant, who lived on London-bridge, and who was lord mayor in 1559; and that he owed his elevation to his humanity and his personal courage. Sir William had an only daughter, Anne, who, when a child, was, by the carelessness of the nurse, dropped from one of the windows of his house into the Thames. The apprentice Edward Osborne, no sooner knew of the accident, than he fearlessly precipitated himself from the bridge into the river, and seizing hold of the child, triumphantly swam with her to the shore. When the child grew up to womanhood, as her father was rich, she had many suitors, among whom was the Earl of Shrewsbury; but the father refused them all, saying, that as Osborne had saved her he should have her. They were married, and their descendant is the present Duke of Leeds, at whose house a portrait of Sir William Hewet in his robes, as lord mayor, is prized much higher than a Corregio or a Titian.

The Marquis of Cornwallis is lineally descended from Thomas Cornwalleys, merchant, who was sheriff of London in 1378.

The noble house of Wentworth may justly boast of its descent, from a London citizen, whose virtue even subdued the tyranny of Henry VIII. and awed him into respect. Sir W. Fitzwilliam was alderman of London and sheriff in 1506. He was, at one time, a retainer in the service of Cardinal Wolsey; and when that haughty man had incurred the displeasure of his sovereign, he had the courage and the virtue to befriend him. Henry when informed of it, had the generosity to pardon him, and the honesty to acknowledge that he had few such servants as Mr. Fitzwilliam, whom he immediately knighted. This Sir William, with that spirit of beneficence which has descended to his posterity, built the greater part of the present church of St. Andrew Undershaft, and bequeathed a considerable portion of his property to charitable purposes.—One bequest, though small, is remarkable, as it shows how far he had anticipated the justice of succeeding ages. He left his mansion in St.