

No longer a congeries of practically separate and often mutually hostile communities, owing allegiance to this Earl or that Baron, but, roughly speaking, a single land under the domination of a single power, England at last had opportunity to commence the slow process of welding its separated parts into a homogeneous whole.

Had the crown been on the head of a less capable politician than the fourth Edward, this wholesale removal of the local rulers would probably have resulted in a chaos of anarchy; but Edward, who, under the veil of lightness and profligacy, concealed an exceedingly astute brain and a far-seeing grasp of affairs, managed to centralize authority in the Crown so thoroughly that, reaping where he had sown, the seventh Henry was able to build up that irresistible royal tyranny which the eighth Henry used—and, indeed, absolutely required—in order to uproot the Papal jurisdiction and the power of the monastic orders from the land.

The Feudal System was dead, the pre-eminence of the Catholic Church and its monasteries a thing of the past. But among a sturdy, rude, strong-affectioned people, made more than usually conservative by their insular exclusion from the interaction of continental traffic and commerce, it may be possible sometimes, with sufficient leverage, to suddenly uproot an ancient institution, but never possible to absolutely and instantaneously destroy the spirit and sympathies on which that institution fed.

Therefore, the feudal spirit lived on, in a gradually more and more diluted form, and is quite unmistakably alive at this present day, forming one very important ingredient in English character. In the same way, the unquestioning faith and profound reverence for holy things, of which the opulence and magnificence of the Church had been both symbol and stimulus, was not rooted out when the convents and cathedrals fell from their former glory.

On the contrary, the spirit of religion, hardened, as it were, and intensified by persecution and counter-persecution, embittered by burnings and beheadings on the one side, hang-