

tions for keeping every item of business in its proper form. Thus, for example, this 'Dialogue of the Exchequer' informs us that every item of receipt and payment has to be entered in three different records, or 'rolls,' kept by different hands, and to pass through various stages for approval, before it can be regarded as lawfully made. And again, though, doubtless, the King was entitled to order any payment he liked out of his own treasury, he had to do it by a proper 'writ,' which had to be 'tested' or countersigned by the proper official, and sealed with a seal kept by another official, and then delivered to another official, and so on. It is not difficult to see how these precise forms (in which the Norman lawyers excelled) would, in fact, restrict the exercise of the King's personal authority; for each step in the process would give opportunity for objections and difficulties, while the recipient or payer of the item would be equally interested in seeing that the proper forms were observed, because, if there was the smallest error, he would not get his money or his acquittance.

Official control of this kind would, naturally, develop greatly during the periods when the King was an infant or otherwise incapable of judging for himself; as was the case with Henry III at the beginning of his reign (p. 24), and with Henry VI at frequent intervals during his long reign.

THE SEALS ACT

Accordingly, we are not surprised to find that, even during the reign of Henry VIII, which followed soon after, an Act of Parliament was passed providing that every exercise of the royal authority which required the use of the Great Seal should be preceded by no less than three distinct stages, being authorized first by 'sign manual,' then by the royal signet, thirdly by the privy seal, each in charge of a separate official, who