PREFACE

The aim of the following work is defined by its title; it is a history, not of English Kings or English Conquests, but of the English People. At the risk of sacrificing much that was interesting and attractive in itself, and which the constant usage of our historians has made familiar to English readers, I have preferred to pass lightly and briefly over the details of foreign wars and diplomacies, the personal adventures of kings and nobles, the pomp of courts, or the intrigues of favourites, and to dwell at length on the incidents of that constitutional, intellectual, and social advance in which we read the history of the nation itself. It is with this purpose that I have devoted more space to Chaucer than to Cressy, to Caxton than to the petty strife of Yorkist and Lancastrian, to the Poor Law of Elizabeth than to her victory at Cadiz, to the Methodist revival than to the escape of the Young Pretender.

Whatever the worth of the present work may be, I have striven throughout that it should never sink into a "drum and trumpet history." It is the reproach of historians that they have too often turned history into a mere record of the butchery of men by their fellow-men. But war plays a small part in the real story of European nations, and in that of England its part is smaller than in any. The only war which has profoundly affected English society and English government is the Hundred Years' War with France, and of that war the results were simply evil. If I have said little of the glories of Cressy, it is because I have dwelt much on the wrong and misery which prompted the verse of Longland and the preaching of Ball. But on the other hand, I have never shrunk from telling at length the triumphs of peace. I have restored to their place among the achievements of Englishmen the "Faerie Queen" and the "Novum Organum." I have set Shakspere among the heroes of the Elizabethan age, and placed the scientific inquiries of the Royal Society side by side with the victories of the New Model. If some of the conventional figures of military and political history occupy in my pages less than the space usually given them, it is because I have had to find a place for figures little heeded in common history—the figures of the missionary, the poet, the printer, the merchant, or the philosopher.

In England, more than elsewhere, constitutional progress has been the result of social development. In a brief summary of our history such as the present, it was impossible to dwell as I could have wished to dwell on every phase of this development; but I have endeavoured to point out, at great crises, such as those of
the Peasant Revolt or the rise of the New Monarchy, how much of our political history is the outcome of social changes; and throughout I have drawn greater attention to the religious, intellectual, and industrial progress of the nation itself than has, so far as I remember, ever been done in any previous history of the same extent.

The scale of the present work has hindered me from giving in detail the authorities for every statement. But I have prefixed to each section a short critical account of the chief contemporary authorities for the period it represents as well as of the most useful modern works in which it can be studied. As I am writing for English readers of a general class I have thought it better to restrict myself in the latter case to English books, or to English translations of foreign works where they exist. This is a rule which I have only broken in the occasional mention of French books, such as those of Guizot or Mignet, well known and within reach of ordinary students. I greatly regret that the publication of the first volume of the invaluable Constitutional History of Professor Stubbs came too late for me to use it in my account of those early periods on which it has thrown so great a light.

I am only too conscious of the faults and oversights in a work, much of which has been written in hours of weakness and ill health. That its imperfections are not greater than they are, I owe to the kindness of those who have from time to time aided me with suggestions and corrections; and especially to my dear friend Mr. E. A. Freeman, who has never tired of helping me with counsel and criticism. Thanks for like friendly help are due to Professor Stubbs and Professor Bryce, and in literary matters to the Rev. Stopford Brooke, whose wide knowledge and refined taste have been of the greatest service to me. I am indebted to the kindness of Miss Thompson for permission to use the Genealogical Tables prefixed to my work, and to Mr. Freeman for a like permission to use some of the maps in his "Old English History."

The Chronological Annals which precede the text will, I trust, be useful in the study of those periods where the course of my story has compelled me to neglect the strict chronological order of succession. In using this book as a school book, both teacher and scholar would do well to study them side by side with the text.