

A PEER cannot lose his nobility, but by death or attainder; though there was an instance, in the reign of Edward the fourth, of the degradation of George Nevile duke of Bedford by act of parliament^b, on account of his poverty, which rendered him unable to support his dignity^c. But this is a singular instance: which serves at the same time, by having happened, to shew the power of parliament; and, by having happened but once, to shew how tender the parliament hath been, in exerting so high a power. It hath been said indeed^d, that if a baron waste his estate, so that he is not able to support the degree, the *king* may degrade him: but it is expressly held by later authorities^e, that a peer cannot be degraded but by act of *parliament*.

THE commonalty, like the nobility, are divided into several degrees; and, as the lords, though different in rank, yet all of them are peers in respect of their nobility, so the commoners, though some are greatly superior to others, yet all are in law peers, in respect of their want of nobility^f.

THE first name of dignity, next beneath a peer, was antiently that of *vidames*, *vice domini*, or *valvasors*^g: who are mentioned by our antient lawyers^h as *viri magnae dignitatis*; and sir Edward Cokeⁱ speaks highly of them. Yet they are now quite out of use; and our legal antiquarians are not agreed upon even their original or antient office.

^b 4 Inst. 355.

^c The preamble to the act is remarkable: "forasmuch as oftentimes it is seen, that when any lord is called to high estate, and hath not convenient livelyhood to support the same dignity, it induceth great poverty and indigence, and causeth oftentimes great extortion, embracery, and maintenance to be had; to the great

"trouble of all such countries where such estate shall happen to be: therefore, &c."

^d Moor. 678.

^e 12 Rep. 107. 12 Mod. 56.

^f 2 Inst. 29.

^g Camden. *ibid.*

^h Bracton. l. 1. c. 8.

ⁱ 2 Inst. 667.