there was always a danger that the constitution would succumb, not to the tyrannical usurpations of the crown, but to the selfish interests of the nobles.

On the death of Alfonso III. the crown passed to his brother James II. (1291-1327). The new king handed over Sicily to his younger brother Frederick, thus creating a separate dynasty in that island. In the hope of depressing the greater barons, James II. strengthened the hands of the justiciar and sought to conciliate the clergy and citizens to the crown. By these steps he succeeded in avoiding any open conflict during his reign, and at the same time he sought to secure external unity by an edict which declared the three provinces of Aragon, Catalonia, and Valencia to be for ever indivisible (1319). But his successor, Alfonso IV. (1327-1336), did not hesitate to break this edict, in spirit if not in letter, by carving out great fiefs for his second wife, Eleanor of Castile, and her children. By this measure he gave rise to the difficulties, aud indirectly to the triumphs, of his son, Pedro IV. (1336-1387). Pedro’s reign is a great epoch in Aragonese history, as to him is due the arrest of the tendencies which threatened to divide and destroy the kingdom. He began by recalling his father’s excessive grants to his stepmother and his half-brothers. The intervention of Alfonso XI. of Castile on behalf of his sister failed to make any impres­sion upon the king, and it was only the pressing danger from the Moors, which was removed in 1340 by the Castilian victory on the Salado, that induced him at last to consent to a compromise. The same desire to unite all the possessions of the Aragonese crown is apparent in his treatment of the king of Majorca, James II., the descendant of James I.’s younger son, who had received from his father the Balearic Islands with Roussillon and Cerdagne as a vassal kingdom. As James II. showed inclination to evade his legal duties towards his suzerain, Pedro seized the first opportunity to pick a quarrel with him. In 1344 all the territories of the king of Majorca were declared to be united to Aragon; and, though James II. made an obstinate resistance, he met with little sup­port from his former subjects, and the hopeless struggle was ended by his death in 1348.

These high-handed measures not unnaturally excited the misgivings of the nobles of Aragon, whose privileges were not likely to be very scrupulously respected by a prince with such an obvious sense of his own rights and duties. In 1347 chance gave them an eminent and capable leader. There was no law against female succession in Aragon, and there was the precedent of Queen Petronilla in its favour. On the other hand, there was a strong prejudice against it, and as a rule preference had been given to males, although further removed from the direct line. Pedro IV. had an only daughter, Constance, and he was eager to secure the succession to her in preference to his brother James, who was popularly regarded as the heir to the throne. This unconcealed intention excited the indignation of James, who was already discontented at the harsh treatment of the king of Majorca. He had no difficulty in inducing most of the chief nobles, including his half-brothers, to form a “ Union," which was also joined by several of the towns in their discontent at the projected settlement of the succession (1347). Pedro was taken by surprise and could only gain time by concessions. He promised to convoke annual meetings of the cortes, to choose his councillors with the approval of the estates, to revoke his will in favour of his daughter, and to recognize his brother as his heir. Soon after this agreement, which left the Union master of the situation, James died; and men were not slow in attributing his death to the machinations of the king. This event was of the greatest advantage to Pedro, as it deprived his opponents of their leader, and

from this moment the rebellion began to be split up by personal rivalries. The king and his advisers were not slow to avail themselves of the opportunity thus offered. The opposition was strongest in Aragon and Valencia, and Pedro succeeded in gaining over the Catalonians, who were always prone to act in isolation from the other provinces. With the troops thus acquired he met the army of the Union at Epila (1348) and won a complete victory. He followed up his success by destroying all the charters which gave any sanction to armed resistance to the crown, and especially the Privilege of Union of 1287. His elder half-brother Ferdinand, who had succeeded James as leader of the revolt and as heir-apparent to the throne, fled to Castile, but the chief nobles were severely punished, and the power of the crown was raised to a height which it had never before attained.

Thus Aragon, following the tendencies of the age, became centralized under a powerful monarchy, and the forces of feudal disunion received a final check. But Pedro IV. was far from establishing anything like a despotism. While destroying the Privilege of Union, he took a solemn oath to respect the political and personal liberties of his subjects, and enjoined the same oath upon his successors. At the same time he strengthened the powers of the justiciar, whose pre-eminence dates from this reign. The position of the king was immensely strengthened by the birth of a son, which destroyed the claims of his half-brothers. The later part of his reign was occupied with a war against Henry II. of Castile, which has been referred to above, and with resistance to James III. of Majorca, who made an unsuccessful effort to recover the territories of his father. Pedro concluded a second marriage with Sibilla, daughter of a Catalonian knight, and her influence involved him in a quarrel with his eldest son, whom he attempted to deprive of the office of lieutenant-general, which custom assigned to the heir to the throne. But he found that the authority of the justiciar was now strong enough to restrain the crown as well as the nobles. Dominic de Cerda, who now held the office, pronounced that the infant was legally entitled to the dignity from which he had been ousted, and compelled the king to restore him. The brief reign of John I. (1387-1395) was mainly occupied with wars in Sicily and Sardinia. The expense which these involved, which was increased by the luxury of a magnificent court, excited the most lively discontent on the part of the cortes. The remonstrances of his subjects were resented by the king, but they were backed up by the authority of the justiciar, and John I. gave way so far as to banish the unpopular favourites from the court. On the king’s death his daughters were passed over, and the crown was transferred to his brother Martin, who was occupied in restoring the Aragonese supremacy in Sicily. Under Martin a private war between the great families of Urrea and Luna was put down, and the dependence of the great nobles was more firmly secured. But the death in 1409 of the king’s only son, Martin the younger, brought the kingdom face to face with the difficulty of a disputed succession. There were two male claimants,—the count of Urgel, a great- grandson of Alfonso IV., and the duke of Gandia, a grandson of James II. The former was the undoubted heir if the succession was absolutely limited to males, while the latter was advanced in years and could only bring forward the old contention of nearness to the royal stock. But, although precedent was in favour of the exclusion of females, there was no definite rule to prevent the succession of their male descendants. Of such claimants there were two,—Louis of Calabria, the son of John I.’s daughter Violante, and Ferdinand, infant of Castile, the son of Martin’s sister Eleanor. Moreover,