PREFACE.

The series of Patent Rolls begins with the third year of King John and extends down to the present time. They consist of contemporary enrolments of Royal Letters Patent, which are so called because, being of a public nature and usually addressed to all persons, they are delivered open, with the Great Seal attached to the bottom. While the original document so issued by the Lord Chancellor or Lord Keeper, in the name of the Sovereign, passes to the person principally concerned, the enrolled copy remains in official custody as a record of the highest authority.

The entries on the Patent Rolls comprise grants and confirmations of liberties, privileges, offices, dignities, lands, pensions, and wardships, to corporations and individuals, civil and ecclesiastical, licences for elections of bishops, abbots, and others, restitutions of temporalities, presentations to benefices, letters of protection, of credence and of safe-conduct, pardons, special liversies, licences for alienation, commissions, and other miscellaneous documents concerning the prerogatives of the Crown, the revenue, the different branches of the judicature, and the relations of English Kings with foreign powers and persons.

It has been justly remarked that "there is scarcely a subject connected with the history or government of this country, or with the most distinguished personages of the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries, which is not illustrated by the Patent Rolls."* Nevertheless there is at present no satisfactory guide to the contents of the Patent Rolls subsequent to the death of King John. Industrious persons have from time to time made copies or abstracts of entries relating to particular periods or to particular subjects, and many such collections are to be found in the British Museum and other public libraries. The only approach, however, to a general Calendar is the volume which was published under

* Nicolas.