

Richard III

A DOUBTFUL VERDICT REVIEWED

THE historical problem which the believers in the guilt of Richard III have to solve is the reconciliation of his general character with the special acts of which he is accused. It is incapable of solution. We are told, by the latest and best authority, Mr. Gairdner, that many of Richard's acts were dictated by charitable feelings or a sense of justice, that he had a great deal of native religious sentiment, that he made it his endeavour to prevent tyranny for the future, that he really studied his country's welfare, that there was nothing mean or paltry in his character, that his taste in buildings was magnificent and princely. He not only restored the property of attainted men to their families, but even gave pensions to the wives of traitors who were plotting against him in foreign countries. This is the picture of a generous and high-minded prince. Yet we are asked to believe that the same prince was a venomous hunch-back from his birth, that he committed two peculiarly atrocious assassinations before he was nineteen, that he murdered his brother, poisoned his wife, waded through innocent blood to a usurped crown, and completed a career of diabolical wickedness by strangling two innocent children who were his nephews. The two pictures cannot well be true representations of the same person. The first is based on the chance admissions of enemies, and on the study of documents which are official in their character, and beyond the suspicion of bias. The second, therefore, seems to call for close scrutiny before it is accepted. At the first blush it has the aspect of an exaggerated caricature.

We must bear in mind that, on the death of Richard, there was a change of dynasty. Henry VII had no valid title to the throne. It was not only the new king's interest, but a necessity of his position, that he should cause grave charges to be brought against his predecessor, and that they should be accepted as true. Henry VII had the power and the will to silence all comment. We know that he destroyed evidence in favour of his predecessor. Authors employed by him, and others who were anxious to please him and his successors, were alone permitted to write histories. Not a syllable

was allowed to be uttered on the other side for 160 years. Bernard André, Archbishop Morton, and Polydore Virgil were actually in the pay or under the direct influence of Henry VII. John Rous and Robert Fabyan wrote during his reign, accepted his version of events and sought his favour. The Monk of Croyland Abbey, although he wrote during Henry's reign, is the sole writer with even a pretence to independence, for he did not write with a view to publication. Henry VII began the business of vilifying his predecessor very early in his reign. It was indeed a matter of the utmost moment to him, for he appears to have considered that a belief in the alleged crimes of Richard was essential to the security of his own position. He brought over a blind Gascon named Bernard André, whom he appointed his poet-laureate and historiographer. André began to write the life of his patron in 1500. It is very brief, with several gaps, and he left it incomplete when he died in about 1522.

By far the most important of the original authorities and the one on whose testimony all subsequent history has mainly been based, is Archbishop Morton. His narrative is contained in the 'History of Richard III' attributed to Sir Thomas More, who was in Morton's household when a boy. This work first appeared in Hardyng's Chronicle, printed by Grafton in 1543. It was embodied in Hall's Chronicle and copied by Holinshed. Fourteen years after its publication another and somewhat different version was brought out by Rastell in 1557. Rastell was related to Sir Thomas More, and he alleged that his version was taken from a manuscript written in about 1513 in More's handwriting. A Latin version, written long before its publication, was printed at Louvain in 1566 with various additions. It cannot have been the original version, for it is addressed to Henry VIII, and Morton died in 1500. The history, as we have it, contains long speeches and dialogues which must have been fabricated by the writer. The title given by the publisher is misleading. It is not a 'History of Richard III,' but a very detailed narrative of events from the death of Edward IV to the accession of Richard, a period of less than three months. It must certainly have been written or dictated by Morton, for no one else could have been cognisant of some of the events. It ends abruptly at a point just before the date of Morton's flight from England. His personal knowledge ceased with his departure, and here the story suddenly comes to an end. He was personally acquainted with every detail that is related, and he possessed an exceptionally accurate memory.¹ The errors and alterations of dates in the narrative must consequently have been made intentionally and with an object. The story of the murder of the princes at the end of the book cannot have been written by Morton, because it alludes to events

¹ More's *Utopia*, p. 20.

which happened after 12 October 1500, the date of that prelate's death.

John Morton was born at Beer Regis in Dorsetshire, early in the fifteenth century. He began life as a lawyer, and became a master in chancery, increasing his income by taking orders. He took the Lancastrian side in the civil war, and fled to the continent with Queen Margaret in 1462. His fortunes were then at a low ebb, but they brightened when the earl of Warwick came to France to betray the cause of Edward IV. Morton attached himself to Warwick at Angers, went with him to England in 1470, escaped from Barnet to join Queen Margaret at Weymouth, and was with her at Tewkesbury. Obtaining a pardon from Edward, he was made Master of the Rolls, and became one of the greatest pluralists of the age. He was grasping and avaricious. He received a bribe from Louis XI for inducing his own sovereign to accept dishonourable terms of peace, and was further bought with a pension of 2,000 crowns a year. The contrast between the upright conduct of the Duke of Gloucester on this occasion and his own baseness probably explains the wily priest's malignant hostility to Richard. Morton was made bishop of Ely in 1479. On the death of Edward IV he saw a wide opening for his ambition in the chances of a long minority. He was heart and soul in the conspiracy of Hastings and the Woodville faction against the protector. He brought Hastings to his death, but escaped himself. The incorrigible plotter was entrusted to the custody of the duke of Buckingham. By his cunning artifices he induced that weak nobleman to become a traitor. He led Buckingham to his death, but secured his own safety. He then joined Henry Tudor's conspiracy abroad, and it was doubtless through Morton's advice that the Welsh adventurer put forward a claim to the crown. Success at length attended the intriguer's schemes. Henry VII made him chancellor and archbishop of Canterbury. After much importunity a cardinal's hat was obtained for him from the Borgian pope. He became enormously rich, and was one of the most odious instruments of Henry's extortions. In his old age he wrote or dictated this libel on King Richard III in the interests of his patron.

Such was the man who held the principal brief against our last Plantagenet. But Rastell assumed that this 'History of Richard III' was composed by Sir Thomas More because a copy in his handwriting was found among his papers. The previous publication by Grafton proves that there were other copies abroad, differing slightly from each other, and there is no reason for assuming that the copy in More's handwriting was the original. Indeed there is evidence that it was not. Grafton's version contains a good deal at the end which is not in Rastell's narrative attributed to More. The latter ends abruptly, as if the whole had not been copied.

The respect with which this production has been treated is entirely due to Sir Thomas More's reputed authorship. It is in reality an unscrupulous party pamphlet, and its authorship ought not to affect our judgment of its character. Yet the reply to any objection to statements contained in it has hitherto been that it was written by the good and virtuous Sir Thomas More, and therefore must be true.³

If it was written by More, so much the worse for More's character for truth and decency. But internal evidence makes it certain that More did not write it. The author was an eyewitness at the deathbed of Edward IV. Morton was an eyewitness. But More was then a baby in arms, if indeed he was born. This settles the question. Sir Thomas made an incomplete copy of a work which was attracting a great deal of attention, and of which there were other copies in circulation, when he was a young man. The date of the copy is said by Rastell to be 1513. The actual compiler of the book, as we have it, is unknown. But the inspiration of the whole work, with the exception of the story of the murder of the young princes at the end, is undoubtedly from Archbishop Morton. It is not too much to say that the continued belief in the alleged crimes of Richard III is mainly due to the erroneous assumption that his chief accuser was Sir Thomas More.

Another authority is John Rous, the so-called hermit of Guy's Cliff, who was an antiquary and heraldic draughtsman. He knew King Richard personally, and, on a pictorial roll representing a pedigree of the earls of Warwick, he spoke of him as 'a mighty prince and special good lord, the most victorious prince Richard, in his realm full commendably punishing offenders of the laws, especially oppressors of his commons, by which discreet guiding he got great thanks and love of all his subjects, rich and poor.' Rous also wrote an 'Historia regum Angliae,' which was not quite finished when Richard was killed. So he dedicated it to Henry VII, and heaped virulent abuse on the fallen king whom he had fawned upon when living with fulsome praise. He crowded his venom into a page or two at the end, an afterthought to please his new patron. The testimony of such an unblushing time-server as Rous must be rejected as worthless. Yet in one or two instances he has unintentionally revealed the truth where the official Tudor writers have endeavoured to conceal it.

Robert Fabyan was a clothier and alderman of London, who chronicled the events of earlier times and of his own day. He wrote during the reign of Henry VII, for he speaks of Lord Stanley as the Earl of Derby, the earldom being a creation of Henry. He was a Tudor partisan, anxious to please the reigning powers, and ready to retail any story against the fallen king, even to wholesale falsification of dates. His chronicle was first published in 1516.

³ Sharon Turner, iii. 462; Jesse, 156 n. and 500.

Next to Morton, the Italian who arrived in England in 1501 was the most serviceable writer on the Tudor side. Polydore Virgil was the paid historian of Henry. He was a native of Urbino, and was sent to England by his patron, the infamous Pope Alexander VI, as assistant collector of Peter's pence. Henry requested him to undertake the history, placing all official materials at his disposal, and doubtless indicating the line he was to take. He proved an apt pupil, and was rewarded with several lucrative church preferments. His history was completed in 1534. Polydore Virgil was a man of learning and research, and the early part of his work is valuable and is written in excellent Latin. But he did not hesitate to misrepresent facts not only to please his patrons, but to gratify his own spite and malignity.³ In his account of events in the life of Richard he recorded the version that would be pleasing to his employers. Polydore Virgil had access to the works of Morton, Rous, and Fabyan, and he is said to have destroyed numerous original documents which may be assumed to have disproved his statements.⁴

These five authors are the counsel and witnesses of Richard's unscrupulous enemy and successor. Three were well paid for their work, the other two wrote in the hope of reward and under the strong conviction that their own self-interest made it necessary for them to revile the dead king. The second continuation of the Croyland Chronicle occupies an entirely different position. It remained unpublished for nearly two centuries. There is every reason for believing that the monks who wrote it, though one was prejudiced and the other credulous and easily deceived, intended to relate what they believed to be true. The first part of this continuation bears internal evidence of having been written by one monk who concludes with some local notices respecting the abbey and its inmates. Then another monk took up the chronicling pen, and ended his part in the same way. It is capable of proof that this continuation of the Croyland Chronicle was written by at least two monks. In referring to the death of Henry VI, the first monk prays that the tyrant who caused it may be given time for repentance. This part must, therefore, have been written while the tyrant in question was alive, whether Edward IV, Gloucester, or Rivers is intended. The second monk says at the end that the work was finished on 30 Apr. 1486, and that it was written in ten days. Edward, Gloucester, and Rivers were all dead in April 1486. Consequently these two passages must have been written by different hands.

The first of these monks was the most judicious of the two, and he had probably once mixed in the world. He mentions a counsellor of Edward IV who was a doctor in Common Law. In the

³ Lord Herbert of Cherbury, *Henry VIII*, p. 9.

⁴ Caius, *De antiquitate Cantabrigiae* (1574), p. 52.

margin there is a note to the effect that the same man wrote that part of the chronicle. If this note is to be relied on, the first monk had once been in the service of Edward IV, but he had Lancastrian sympathies like Morton; for he refers to the executions after Tewkesbury as vindictive, and he hints at a rumour that Henry VI met his death by order of his successor. His part of the chronicle covers the period from 1471 to the death of Edward IV. The second monk seems to have known nothing of the outer world, and was very credulous. It is with him that we have to do in this inquiry. When he has not been misled, he gives the dates of events correctly, and this is most important, for by his means the falsifications by the unscrupulous writers in the pay of Henry VII are detected. He alone gives the true grounds on which Richard's claim to the crown rested, which are misrepresented by Morton and Polydore Virgil, and left unstated by Rous and Fabyan.

The later chroniclers, such as Grafton, Hall, Stow, Holinshed, and Buck, copied from the earlier writers. They are not original authorities. Hall's chronicle is little more than a free translation of Polydore Virgil, served up with embellishments invented by himself. For instance, when he described the burial of Henry VI he said that the corpse was conveyed to Chertsey 'without priest or clerk, torch or taper, singing or saying.' It so happens that the accounts of payments have been preserved for obsequies and masses said by four orders of brethren, for linen cloth, spices, and wages of men carrying torches. Stow is more trustworthy. But these later writers cannot be relied upon for facts. It was their habit to add numerous minor details to the stories they received from their predecessors, and it cannot reasonably be doubted that these additions were inventions intended to add force or interest to their narratives. Hall's account of the funeral of Henry VI is one out of many instances. But when these later chroniclers insert or quote from documents the case is different. Thus Hall and Grafton give the conversation between Morton and the duke of Buckingham at Brecknock, being a copy of some original document. Buck gives the substance of a letter from Elizabeth of York to the duke of Norfolk, the original of which he had seen. Hall gives the proceedings of the council when it was decided to confine Elizabeth Woodville in Bermondsey Nunnery. In such cases I think that the evidence of these later writers may be accepted. But we can only use the evidence of writers who were contemporary with Henry VII, in considering the charges against his predecessor.

These writers brought an indictment, in many counts, against Richard III, after his death. It will be seen, in the course of this discussion, with what object these accusations were made, and why a belief in them was considered to be so important to the success of the Tudor usurpation. The reckless profusion of abuse was due to

the complete license of the traducers. No one could appear for the accused. The young king was dead, his corpse subjected to cowardly insults, his friends proscribed, his people silenced. Calumny was triumphant and unchecked. Yet there was method in the scheme of the Tudor writers. Their accusations were all intended to lead up to a belief in the dead king's guilt with regard to one central crime.

The evidence on which the Tudor writers mainly rely for Richard's guilt, as regards the murder of his nephews, is the perpetration of numerous former crimes. We must, therefore, examine this evidence as it relates to each charge. The first concerns Richard's alleged deformity and the circumstances of his birth.

Rous states that he was two years in his mother's womb, that he was born feet foremost, with hair down to his shoulders, with a complete set of teeth, and that his right shoulder was much higher than his left. Morton says that his left shoulder was higher than his right. Polydore Virgil says the shoulders were unequal. Fabyan and the Croyland monk do not say a word against Richard's personal appearance. The obvious fables, in these descriptions, throw just suspicion on all other statements from the same sources. The object of the Tudor historians, in commencing their grotesque caricature of an imaginary monster with these stories of his personal deformity, is apparent. They intended to make him detestable from the outset. They calculated that improbable crimes would be more readily believed, if the alleged perpetrator was a deformed hunchback born with teeth. They were right. Modern writers have also understood this method of treatment. Lord Macaulay was careful to prepare the minds of his readers for the alleged judicial crimes of Sir Elijah, by telling them that little Impey was in the habit of stealing cakes at school. The great essayist, as well as the Tudor historians, knew his public. The one invented the pilfering story, and the others the hump back with a similar object. If a judge had been a juvenile thief, or if a king had been a deformed little monster, the charges against them in after life would be more readily accepted as true. This is illogical, but it is human nature. Richard was described as a hunchback, and made to commit several atrocious crimes, in order to prepare men's minds to receive, without incredulity, the story of the murder of his nephews. It was probably anticipated that this final draft on their powers of belief would be dishonoured unless the alleged murderer had been steeped in crime from his infancy.

At the early age of eighteen Richard is accordingly accused of having committed a cowardly and inhuman murder in cold blood, after the battle of Tewkesbury. His accuser is the Italian who was the paid historian of Henry VII. Contemporary evidence is unanimous in contradicting this accusation. There was only one eye-witness

who wrote an account of the battle. He said that young Edward of Lancaster 'was taken fleeing to the townwards, and slain in the field.'⁶ This was the plain truth. He fought bravely and fell in the retreat. The next writer, in order of time, was Warkworth, but he was not present. He wrote—'There was slain on the field, Prince Edward, which cried for succour to the duke of Clarence.' Bernard André, the paid historian of Henry VII, and Comines say the same; that he fell on the field of battle. Fabyan, writing long afterwards to please Henry VII, is the first who started the story that young Edward was taken prisoner and brought before the king. He added that Edward IV 'strake him in the face with his gauntlet, on which the prince was by the king's servants incontinently slain.' This story must be rejected as fabulous, because it contradicts all the contemporary accounts. But it no doubt suggested to Polydore Virgil a version which would be still more acceptable to his employer. This protégé of Pope Alexander VI conceived the idea of giving it a lurid Borgian colouring, better suited to the latitude of Urbino than to that of Tewkesbury. Instead of the king's servants, he substituted Clarence, Gloucester, and Hastings as the assassins. Holinshed added Dorset.

The question is whether Polydore Virgil repeated a tradition or invented a slander. Rous and Morton wrote with the object of bringing every charge they could collect against Richard. Yet they are silent about the murder of young Edward at Tewkesbury. If there had been a tradition of the sort, they must have known it, and would have eagerly repeated it. In the case of Morton this silence is a damning proof against Polydore Virgil. For Morton was actually present at Tewkesbury. If young Edward was murdered, he cannot have failed to be cognisant of the crime. Yet in a book prepared with the object of enumerating the alleged crimes of Richard he said nothing. He had no scruples. He repeated all he could think of, with the object of heaping opprobrium on Richard's memory, but there is not a hint about assassinating Edward of Lancaster. Morton's silence, under these circumstances, amounts to a proof that the story was not based on a tradition, but that it was a fabrication of the unscrupulous Italian. For if any one knew all the details of the battle of Tewkesbury at first hand, it was Morton. He was there. His silence explodes the fable. It also convicts Polydore Virgil of having fabricated an exceptionally foul slander. The evidence of such a man is worthless on any point in which he or his employer is personally interested.

Virgili duo sunt: alter Maro, tu Polydore
Alter: Tu mendax: ille poeta fuit.

The charge against the duke of Gloucester that he murdered Henry VI is an insinuation rather than an accusation. Morton

⁶ Fleetwood, *Chron.* p. 80.

says, 'as men constantly say,' Polydore Virgil, 'it was the continual report,' Fabyan, 'the common fame,' Rous, 'as many believe.' We must, therefore, treat it, in the first instance, as a rumour only, and judge of it from probabilities. We are asked to believe that young Richard at the age of eighteen, when he had just won great military renown, arrived at the Tower in the evening of one day, with orders to proceed on active service early the next morning, that he found time to induce Lord Rivers, the constable, who was his political enemy, to deliver up charge to him, in order that he might assassinate a defenceless and feeble invalid with his own hand, a deed in which he was only remotely interested, and which might just as well have been perpetrated by any hired jailer; and that, although the act must have been done with the knowledge of Lord Rivers and his officials, and of Henry's numerous servants, yet there was never any certainty about it. Rivers, be it remembered, was Richard's enemy.

This grossly improbable story bears the evidence of its origin clearly marked. It was put forward in the reign and in the interests of Henry VII. It was a rumour manufactured by his paid writers. As Gloucester was only at the Tower for one night, namely that of 21 May, two of his traducers, Fabyan and Warkworth's informant, saw the necessity for placing Henry's death on 21 May. Polydore Virgil forgot this necessity and placed it much later in the month. So that these Tudor authorities do not agree, and are all unworthy of credit. The truth is established by the evidence of Henry's household accounts. The expenses and diet of Henry and his ten servants were paid for fourteen days from 11 May, that is until 24 May, the date of his death.⁶ On the 24th Gloucester was at Sandwich. The only contemporary writer, in a letter to the citizens of Bruges, confirmed this date.

Laing, in his continuation of Henry's History of Great Britain, mistook the day on which the accounts were audited and passed, namely 12 June, for the day on which the expenses were incurred, and concluded that Henry VI was alive on 12 June. This was triumphantly pointed out by Dr. Lingard. But although Laing made a mistake, the date of the auditing does not affect the question. The fact remains that the board of Henry and his servants was paid, and that he was consequently alive for fourteen days after 11 May, that is until 24 May. His murder by Gloucester thus becomes a physical impossibility.

Other charges against Gloucester before his brother's death may be dismissed more summarily. He was said to have forced Lady Anne Neville to marry him immediately after he had murdered Edward of Lancaster, who was her husband. Edward was not her husband, and Gloucester did not murder him. On the other hand

* Rymer, xi. 712.

the two young cousins, Richard and Anne, were brought up together. Years before, at the inaugural feast of Archbishop Neville, they are mentioned as sitting at one table together. Their union was most natural. Anne was her husband's constant companion in every important crisis of his life, in sorrow and in joy, and there is good reason to believe that the marriage was a happy one. The malignant slander involved in the insinuation that Richard poisoned his wife, is due to the brain of the Italian priest, and is a peculiarly Borgian conception. Anne's illness was a lingering decline, during which she was assiduously cared for by her sorrowing husband and her physicians. The calumny that she was poisoned was merely an insinuation, but most of the Tudor calumnies take the form of insinuations. 'It is a charge,' wrote Sir Harris Nicolas, 'which is deserving of attention for no other reason than as it affords a remarkable example of the manner in which ignorance and prejudice sometimes render what is called history more contemptible than a romance.' But it is important as affording a further proof of the untrustworthiness of the authorities who made it, Polydore Virgil and Rous.

The most elaborate and detailed part of the indictment against Richard III refers to the so-called usurpation, including the period from his arrival in London to his coronation. The events of the interregnum had to be represented in such a way that it might appear that Henry Tudor was righteously superseding a tyrannical usurper. This was a matter of vital importance to the intruding dynasty. Accordingly much art was devoted to the preparation of a plausible story, while documents that would contradict it were carefully but not always effectually destroyed. The narrative of Richard's accession is mainly due to Morton. He was a leading actor in, and an eyewitness of, what he described. He was a very able and clever man, and he was intimately acquainted with the facts as they really happened. Consequently every mistake that is detected in his narrative; every date that is falsified, must have been inserted designedly, and with a special object.

Morton opens his case with the assumption that the duke of Gloucester had always intended to supplant his nephew. The truth is exactly the reverse of Morton's version. Gloucester's conduct was straightforward and loyal. After attending solemn obsequies of his brother in York Minster, he called on the nobility and gentry of Yorkshire to swear allegiance to his young nephew. When he arrived in London he ordered preparations to be made for his nephew's coronation, and he sent summonses to forty esquires to receive knighthood of the Bath on the occasion. He also caused the dresses to be got ready, which were to be worn by his nephew at the coronation. These preparations must have been well known to Morton who passed them over in silence, because

they would tend to give a true impression, where he wanted to leave a false one. This state of things lasted for a month after the Protector Gloucester arrived in London with his nephew. On 5 June the protector had fixed the coronation for the 22nd. But now there came a change. On or about 8 June, Dr. Robert Stillington, bishop of Bath and Wells, revealed to the council the long concealed fact that Edward IV was married by the bishop to the Lady Eleanor Talbot, widow of a son of Lord Butler of Sudley, and daughter of the first earl of Shrewsbury, before he went through a secret marriage ceremony with Elizabeth Woodville, the widow of Sir John Grey. Dr. Stillington, when he performed the ceremony, had been strictly enjoined by the king not to reveal it. The Lady Eleanor afterwards retired to a convent at Norwich, where she died, and was buried in the church of the Carmelites.⁷

Dr. Stillington was the second son of a gentleman of good family, living on his own land at Acaster Selby in Yorkshire. He was a churchman of eminence, and in 1466 became bishop of Bath and Wells, and lord privy seal. In 1467 he was installed in the high office of lord chancellor, and delivered an eloquent and statesmanlike speech at the opening of parliament in May 1468. After holding the office of chancellor with dignity and credit for six years, he resigned owing to ill-health in 1473. If the Woodvilles had any knowledge of the first marriage, Bishop Stillington would be a source of anxiety and fear to them. We find that the duke of Clarence was attainted in February 1478, on a series of charges, most of them frivolous and none sufficiently serious to account for his death at the hands of his own brother. There must have been something behind. Mr. Gairdner has suggested that the execution of Clarence was due to his having discovered the secret. Certainly that would account for it. The influence of the Woodvilles was paramount, and it would then be a necessity of their continuance in power that Clarence should cease to live. It is very significant that, at the very time of Clarence's attainder, Bishop Stillington was arrested and imprisoned for 'uttering words prejudicial to the king and his state.' He was pardoned in the following June, 1478. All this points to the discovery of the first marriage by Clarence, and to the utterance of some imprudent speech by the bishop, which was expiated by imprisonment followed by renewed promises of silence.

Dr. Stillington appears to have been a pious and munificent bishop. He founded a collegiate chapel on his brother's land at Acaster, for a provost and fellows, and for free education in grammar, writing, and music. He was an able statesman and diplomatist, and a very loyal and faithful adherent of the white rose. His one fault was that he did not ensure his own destruction by proclaiming Edward's secret before that king's death. There was

⁷ *Weever's Funeral Monuments*, p. 805.

no urgent obligation to do so. But when the necessity arose, he was bound to come forward. Gloucester was only a child when his brother's matrimonial entanglements were formed, and knew nothing. He was eleven and a half when Elizabeth Woodville was taken into favour, and the Butler marriage was of a still earlier date.

The announcement of this previous marriage to the council, by Bishop Stillington, made it inevitable that the matter should be thoroughly sifted. The bishop 'brought in instruments, proctors, and notaries of the law, with depositions of divers witnesses.'⁸ The majority of the council must have seen at once that the illegitimate son of the late king could not succeed. Such a proceeding would inevitably be the precursor of innumerable troubles. The case was prepared to be laid before the parliament which was summoned to meet on June 25. There was, however, a small but powerful minority in the council, led by Lord Hastings and Bishop Morton, to whom the prospect of losing the openings to their ambition offered by the succession of a minor was most distasteful. Both these statesmen had received bribes from Louis XI, and were not, therefore, men of scrupulous integrity. Hastings, indeed, had been guilty of the baseness of accepting bribes both from Louis and from the duke of Burgundy. These malcontents, with some others, commenced opposition, began to meet apart, and intrigued with the Woodville faction. The protector became alarmed and ordered troops up from York. The conspirators secretly issued a *supersedeas*,⁹ ordering the members of parliament not to come to London, so as to prevent any decision from being arrived at respecting the succession. Finally a plot was formed to seize the protector. It was probably a question of hours when, acting on a warning from Catesby, the protector arrested Lord Hastings, and broke up the conspiracy.

Morton relates these events with matchless cunning. His object was to instil a belief that Hastings worked against the Woodvilles throughout, and in concert with Gloucester, thus endeavouring to show that there was no conspiracy. In order to create this impression he gives two false dates. He makes young Richard leave sanctuary, to join his brother Edward, on 9 June. The true date was the 16th.¹⁰ He asserts that Lord Rivers was beheaded on 13 June, the very day of the arrest of Hastings, and he makes a great point of it, observing, as a striking coincidence, that Hastings suffered death on the selfsame day and about the selfsame hour as Rivers, whose execution he had approved. He knew this to be false. Rivers made his will on the 23rd, and was beheaded on the 25th. Morton had a motive for falsifying these dates. He wanted

⁸ Grafton, p. 126.

⁹ Davies, *York Records*, p. 154.

¹⁰ Stallworthe's letter. *Exc. Hist.* pp. 14-16.

it to appear that Hastings was an enemy of the Woodville faction to the end, that he was a party to the removal of young Richard from sanctuary and to the execution of Rivers. But why? Clearly because Hastings was not an enemy of the Woodvilles to the end, because, with Morton and others, he had entered into conspiracy with them against the protector. It was important to conceal this because it justified the protector's action against Hastings, and Morton did so by resorting to a falsification of dates.

The astute prelate's minute description of the scene when Hastings was arrested on Friday, 13 June, is exceedingly clever. We have the reminiscences of an eyewitness, who was also a schemer so dealing with the facts as to leave false impressions, clothed in the semblance of veracious recollections. The tale of the strawberries is a masterly touch designed to give an air of reality to the scene. The withered arm is a fabrication intended to conceal the real charge made by the protector. That charge was contained in the proclamation of which Morton professes to give the substance. The seeker after truth would very much prefer the original text. But it was destroyed. Its destruction is a strong presumption in favour of the protector, and justifies the conclusion that the real charge was a serious one. It is incredible that Catesby merely revealed the nonsense about Jane Shore's sorcery. Morton has inserted this rubbish in order to conceal the real charge made by Gloucester. Morton further alleges that 'Shore's wife was of all women the one the queen most hated,' and that she was the mistress of Hastings. She was really the mistress of Dorset, the queen's son,¹¹ and the motive for bringing in the queen's alleged hatred in this place is to conceal the real position of Jane Shore, which was that of a secret agent between the queen's party and Hastings.

Morton would have us believe that Hastings was beheaded on the spot, without trial, and this story is also told by Fabyan, and adopted by Polydore Virgil. It was a version industriously spread by Morton, as a charge of lawless cruelty and indecent haste against the protector. But it was false. Yet Morton must have given publicity to it very soon after the accession of Henry VII, and was obviously very anxious that it should be accepted as true. The date of 13 June for the execution was given to the credulous old Croyland monk, and was accepted by Fabyan, who must have known it to have been false, with such zeal that he added a few extra touches to the story. Fabyan was in London and knew the truth. Yet he clearly implies that the delivery of young Richard and the execution of Rivers took place before the arrest of Hastings. He also falsified dates to reconcile the alleged date of the execution of Hastings with other events, following Morton in this also. The

¹¹ Rymer, xii. 204. .

conclusion seems unavoidable that Fabyan and Morton were in collusion. For both were aware of the truth from personal knowledge, and both perverted it in the same way.

The testimony of master Simon Stallworthe,¹² who wrote a letter from London to Sir William Stonor on Saturday, 21 June, 1483, is quite above suspicion. He said that 'on Friday last was the lord Chambleyn (Hastings) hedded sone after noon.' As Saturday was the 21st, Friday last was the 20th. We here have evidence that Lord Hastings was not beheaded until a week after his arrest, and, as there was no indecent haste, we may assume that there was a trial and sentence before a proper tribunal. It has been suggested that when Stallworthe wrote 'Friday last,' he did not mean Friday last, but the Friday before Friday last. This theory is disproved by the very next line in Stallworthe's letter. He there says that 'on Monday last' young Richard came out of sanctuary. If 'Monday last' meant Monday last, 'Friday last' must be taken to mean Friday last.

The evidence that the story of the hasty execution of the Lord Chamberlain is a fable does not rest solely on Stallworthe's letter. Morton and Fabyan are convicted out of their own mouths. It must be borne in mind that we have several fixed dates. Hastings was arrested on 13 June. It is certain that Thursday, 26 June, was the date of Richard's accession. It is fixed by the year book. Dr. Shaw's sermon was certainly preached on the previous Sunday, that is 22 June. Fabyan, as well as Stallworthe, tells us that the execution of Hastings was on the previous Friday. These are fixed beacons and will lead us to the truth.

Fabyan and Morton had to manipulate these dates so as to make it appear that Hastings was beheaded on the 13th, the very day of his arrest. Fabyan tried to get rid of the week between the 18th and the 20th. He was bound to recognise the fact that the execution was on the Friday before the Sunday of Dr. Shaw's sermon. So he brought the sermon back a week. But the sermon was well known to have been preached on the Sunday before Richard's accession. So he had to move back the accession also, and he placed it on 20 June. Here his dishonesty is detected, for the 20th was not on a Thursday, and that Thursday the 26th was the date of the accession is beyond dispute.

Morton was of course in the same difficulty as regards his dates. But he was far more practised in the manipulation of evidence. Such an old hand would commit himself to dates as little as possible. He would fear them as a thief fears a detective. He only gives one, and he selects the right day of the week, which Fabyan does not. But this is quite enough to convict him. He chose the 19th for the day of Richard's accession, with the very same object as

¹² *Ecc. Hist.* p. 16.

Fabyan, to get rid of the gap between the 19th and 20th; well knowing that the right date was the 26th.

We can now perceive the truth, both through the direct testimony of Stallworthe and through the dishonesty of Morton and Fabyan. Lord Hastings was arrested on 18 June on a charge of treason, tried and sentenced, and executed after a decent interval on Friday, the 20th. Richard committed a fatal mistake in not treating Morton and Stanley in the same way. They richly deserved it, and their impunity was his ruin. Richard mourned for Lord Hastings, his old companion in arms, as soon as the danger was over. This is admitted by his bitterest enemy. 'The Protector loved him well and was loth to have lost him.'¹³ The duke of Gloucester showed his respect and love for the memory of Hastings by at once restoring his children in blood, and granting the forfeited estates to the widow. He also liberally rewarded the brother of Hastings for past services, and granted all his requests.

The trial of Lord Rivers, with Grey, Vaughan, and Hawte, followed on that of Hastings. They had intended to keep the government in their own hands by main force, their baggage contained large quantities of armour and implements of war, which was a proof that they contemplated the raising and arming of a large force, and their designs were undoubtedly treasonable. But the long delay in bringing them to trial justifies the belief that their capital punishment was not intended, if fresh treason had not been brought home to them, arising out of the Hastings conspiracy. Morton brings forward the same accusation in their case, and he gives a false date for the execution. He would have us believe that Rivers and his companions were also put to death 'without so much as the formality of a trial.' But his untruthfulness is exposed by the evidence of another Tudor witness. Rous inadvertently let out the fact that there was a trial, not knowing that there was any reason for concealing it. He certainly did not do so out of any good will for King Richard. There was a trial and the Earl of Northumberland presided at it. He was not the sole judge, but the president acting with other judges.¹⁴ He probably sat as a commissioner to execute the office of lord steward, with a jury of northern peers to try Rivers. Morton falsified the date of the executions, making them earlier by twelve days. One of his objects has already been pointed out. The other was to indicate such haste in the executions as would make the absence of any trial appear probable.

The treasonable designs of Rivers and his associates made their condemnation just, and their punishment was necessary for the safety and tranquillity of the country. The accomplished earl philosophically prepared for death. He had played for high stakes,

¹³ Morton (in Rastell), p. 69.

¹⁴ 'Eorum principalis judex.' Rous, p. 218.

had lost, and was ready to pay the penalty. He showed his confidence in the integrity and kindly feeling of the duke of Gloucester by appointing him supervisor to the will which he made at Sheriff Hutton on 28 June. The trust was not misplaced. He appointed William Catesby, a meritorious but shamefully maligned public servant, to be his executor.

Morton next proceeds to misrepresent the title of King Richard III to the crown. The point is of great importance and merits close attention. The statement of Richard's title to the throne was drawn up and adopted by the Lords Spiritual and Temporal and Commons, between the 8th and the 25th of June. The document was afterwards embodied in an act of parliament, entitled the *Titulus Regius*, with which the writers employed by Henry VII must have been well acquainted. When Henry came to the throne he ordered this act to be repealed without quoting the preamble, with a view to its purport being concealed. He caused it to be destroyed, and threatened any one who kept a copy with fine and imprisonment during his pleasure. In spite of this threat the monk of Croyland told the truth, but his chronicle remained in manuscript. Henry's conduct affords a strong presumption that the title of King Richard was valid. For he was not content with annulling the act. He granted an illusory pardon to Bishop Stillington, who was the principal witness to the truth of the main statement in the *Titulus Regius*. This was done with the object of keeping silence on the subject of the real offence, which was telling the truth. Henry then arrested him on another trumped-up charge, and kept him in close and solitary confinement in Windsor Castle until his death in June 1491.

These proceedings show the immense importance attached by Henry VII to a suppression of the truth relating to Richard's title to the crown. If the previous marriage of Edward IV with Lady Eleanor Butler had not been true, the falsehood would have been eagerly exposed, and there would have been no occasion to invent any other story. On the other hand, if this marriage really took place, the evidence would have been suppressed and another story would have been invented and promulgated. The evidence was suppressed, and a different tale was put forward. The conclusion is inevitable that the statement of a previous marriage of Edward IV with Lady Eleanor Butler was true.

By a mere accident the original draft of the *Titulus Regius* was not destroyed. It was discovered long afterwards among the Tower records. Its tenor was given by the Croyland monk, and it is printed more fully in Speede's History (1611). Richard's title rested on the evidence that Edward's children were illegitimate owing to the previous marriage with Lady Eleanor Butler, and that the children of Clarence were incapacitated by his attainder. It is

certain, therefore, that this and this only was the statement made in inspired sermons and speeches at the time ; for it was the official case of those who advocated Richard's accession. It is impossible that one ground for the claim should have been put forward officially, and another, which was not only different but contradictory, in the sermons and speeches directed to be made at the same time.

Now all this was perfectly well known to Morton and to Polydore Virgil when they concocted their stories. But they believed that the truth had been so effectually placed out of reach that it was safe for them to adopt what tale they chose. Their business was to conceal the truth. They, therefore, stated that Dr. Shaw preached a sermon on the Sunday before Richard's accession in which he calumniated the duchess of York by maintaining that all her sons were by some other man, except Richard who was the only son of the duke, her husband. The object was to throw the reader off the scent with regard to Edward's own connubial proceedings, by bringing an infamous and very absurd charge against his mother.

This is clearly the tale that Polydore Virgil was instructed to put into Dr. Shaw's mouth, and nothing more. For he alludes to the common report that Edward's children were called bastards by Dr. Shaw, and declares that the report was 'voyd of all truthe.' But Morton contradicts this. He also puts the slander about the duchess of York into Dr. Shaw's mouth, and he goes further, making the preacher tell another tale which would make bastards of Edward's children. According to Polydore Virgil the report that Dr. Shaw made bastards of Edward's children was 'voyd of all truthe.' According to Morton the preacher added that Edward was previously married to a woman named Lucy. It will be seen that these authorities contradict each other. Morton's introduction of the name of Elizabeth Lucy was a red herring drawn across the path. His great object was to conceal the name of Lady Eleanor Butler. The absurdity of Morton's story respecting the woman Lucy will be appreciated when we call to mind that she actually had two children by Edward IV. We are asked to believe that Dr. Shaw, in preaching a sermon in support of Richard's claim to the throne, put forward a statement which, if true, would make two children legitimate, whose legitimacy would at once bar any claim on the part of Richard. Such falsehoods alone discredit the authority of Polydore Virgil and Morton. There can now be no doubt that Dr. Shaw in his sermon, if indeed he ever preached it, simply explained to the people the contents of the petition stating Richard's title, which was about to be presented to him. We know that neither the duchess of York nor Elizabeth Lucy was mentioned in that petition.

Morton and Virgil are wholly unworthy of belief on any point relating to Richard III. One more instance of their misrepresentations may be given. They allege that the cause of the duke of Buckingham's discontent was the refusal of King Richard to grant him the moiety of the Bohun lands, that the duke's suit was rejected with many spiteful words, and that there was ever afterwards hatred and distrust between them. The truth is the exact opposite of this. Richard granted Buckingham's petition in the fullest and most generous manner, giving him the lands under the royal sign manual, and all the profits from the date of signature until the formality was completed by authority of parliament.¹⁶ Of course Morton must have had an object in making this misleading statement. It was, no doubt, to conceal the true cause of Buckingham's discontent and subsequent treason ; which were due to Morton's own deceitful and unscrupulous persuasions working on the weak mind of an ambitious and unprincipled nobleman. Assailed by the insidious flattery of this incorrigible intriguer he was hurried into a rash attempt which cost him his life.

The last charge against King Richard is that he intended to marry his illegitimate niece Elizabeth. It is unsustained by any evidence, and is contrary to all probability. Such a project would have stultified the act of parliament on which his title to the crown was based. The king was a politician and was not entirely bereft of his senses. But there is evidence that the scheme was favoured by the girl herself and by her mother, which accounts for the existence of the rumour. Their ages were suitable, the king being thirty-two and his niece in her twenty-first year ; and in a letter to the duke of Norfolk, Elizabeth expressed a strong wish to become the wife of her uncle, who, she said, was 'her only joy and maker in the world.' But Richard himself can never have contemplated such a marriage. Directly the rumour reached his ears he publicly contradicted it. 'The whole tale,' says Sir Harris Nicolas, 'was invented with the view of blackening Richard's character, to gratify the monarch in whose reign all the contemporary writers who relate it flourished.' The same may safely be said of the various stories told about Henry Tudor, while in Brittany, having promised to marry Elizabeth. These stories were doubtless an after-thought of Morton, at a time when Henry and Elizabeth were actually married. Repeated by Polydore Virgil, they were retailed, with the customary embellishments, by Hall and Grafton.

We now arrive at the main question round which all these accusations revolve, and to settle which they were invented. For, in attempting an impartial consideration of the question of the fate of King Edward's sons, it must always be remembered that the main

¹⁶ Dugdale's *Baronage*, i. 163.

argument against Richard rests upon the truth of his previous alleged crimes. This argument is destroyed if Richard was not a venomous hunchback born with teeth, if he was not a cold scheming villain who had already committed two atrocious murders, drowned his brother in a butt of malmsey, slandered his mother, poisoned his wife, and waded through the blood of innocent men to a usurped throne. A careful study of the evidence establishes the fact that these accusations are false, and that they were invented by the writers under a new dynasty in order to blacken the character of the last Plantagenet king, and to make the charge against him, that he murdered his nephews, more plausible. For it was a matter of the utmost moment to Henry VII, not only that the boys should have been put out of the way, but that it should be believed that the crime was perpetrated before his accession.

In reality we have to deal with a different man altogether. The real Richard, who is accused of the murder of his nephews, was not previously steeped in crime. The accusation must now be considered as being brought against a prince of the fifteenth century, if not better certainly not worse than the average of his contemporaries. This at once disposes of the chief point of the evidence against him.

We must approach the questions relating to the fate of the two young sons of Edward IV, without having constantly before our minds the grotesque caricature portrayed by the Tudor writers. Although it is not possible, especially at this distance of time, to account for the workings of any man's mind, or for the motives which may control his actions, it is yet necessary to consider this phase of the question with as much light as we can bring to bear on it. Edward IV always evinced unshaken love and affection for his young brother, and showed the most absolute confidence in him at the time of his death. Richard returned this affection with devoted loyalty. He had no love for the Woodville faction, but he must have felt some regard for his brother's children, being such a man as we believe he has now been shown to have been. This feeling of regard would decrease the strength of any motive producing a desire to put them out of the way for his own ends. But there was no such motive. The boys had been declared to be illegitimate by the unanimous voice of parliament. As claimants to the throne they had ceased to be dangerous. Excepting half a dozen Lancastrian exiles, and a few peers whose absence is accounted for by extreme age or youth or the calls of duty, the whole house of lords was at Richard's coronation. Even the Woodville faction had submitted, and was represented at the coronation by Viscount Lisle and the bishop of Salisbury. The mother of Henry Tudor bore the train of Richard's queen, and his uncle Lord Welles was also in attendance. There was absolutely no party for the illegitimate sons of Edward IV at the time of their alleged murder, and

consequently no danger to be apprehended from them. If the story had put the murders after, or even just before, Buckingham's rising, it would be a little more plausible. But it placed them two or three months before the rising, when the king had not the shadow of a suspicion that any opposition was contemplated. There certainly was no motive for the crime.

It may, however, be argued that the workings of men's minds are inexplicable, and that Richard may have committed the crime from a motive which would seem insufficient to any reasonable man. To decide upon this proposition we can only turn to a consideration of his conduct as regards other persons in the same relationship and position as the two boys, and who might possibly give Richard trouble. There were seven such persons, namely, the five daughters of Edward IV, and the two children of the Duke of Clarence. The king treated his nieces with kindness and consideration as near relations, as soon as they came out of sanctuary, and were placed under his protection. The young earl of Warwick, son of Richard's elder brother Clarence, was a far more formidable rival than the sons of Edward. The former was uncontestedly legitimate, while the latter had been declared to be illegitimate by both houses of parliament. Richard knighted the earl of Warwick, made him a member of his household and of his council, and, on the death of his own son, he made Warwick his heir. It is alleged by Rous that he subsequently displaced the son of Clarence and put him in prison, substituting another nephew, the earl of Lincoln, as his heir. But this is disproved by the York records, where Warwick is shown to be still a member of the council with precedence before Lincoln, only four months previous to the battle of Bosworth. Warwick was still Richard's heir when the end came. We therefore know that Richard did not look upon the children of his elder brothers as enemies to be destroyed, but as relations to be cherished.

We find then that the two young sons of Edward IV went to reside in the royal lodgings in the Tower in June 1483. We have the evidence of Morton that Richard declared 'he would so provide for them, and so maintain them in honourable estate as that all the realm ought and should be content.'¹⁶ In the regulations of King Richard's household, dated 23 July, 1484, some months after the death of his own little son, it is ordained that 'the children are to be together at one breakfast.'¹⁷ That these children were of high rank is shown by the further order that no livery is to exceed the allowance 'but only to my Lord' (Lincoln ?) 'and the children.' These children were probably Edward, son of Clarence, and Edward and Richard, sons of Edward IV, the three nephews of the king who formed part of his household. When the realm was threatened

¹⁶ Grafton, p. 127.

¹⁷ Harl. MS. 483, f. 269.

with invasion, they would naturally be sent to places of safety; Warwick and Elizabeth to Sheriff Hutton, Edward and Richard to the Tower.

There are other circumstances which tend to confirm the belief that the king's nephews were alive and well during the whole period of his reign. It is barely credible that, if there had been foul play, the mother could have been induced by any promises to throw her remaining children on the protection of one who had already violated the most sacred ties as regards her two sons. It is, however, just possible that a weak and selfish woman, weary of confinement in sanctuary, might have been induced to come to terms with the murderer of her sons, in order to obtain a comfortable provision for herself and her daughters. But she did more than this: she sent to her other son Dorset, who was safe in France, advising him to return home and reconcile himself with the king. It is absolutely incredible that she could have done this, if her two sons had been foully murdered by this very king, or even if she did not know that they were alive and well. She remained on friendly terms with Richard until his death, and her daughters attended the festivities at his court. Still stronger evidence, in the same direction, is afforded by the letter to the duke of Norfolk, whether it was written by the king's niece Elizabeth, or by her mother as Mr. Gairdner suggests. Neither mother nor daughter could have spoken of Richard as 'her only joy and maker in the world' or have said that she was 'his in heart and thought,' if he had just murdered the sons of one and the brothers of the other. The thing is quite impossible. If this letter was written, or if the queen dowager sent for Dorset from France, which is a fact, the two boys must have been alive and well.

There remain for consideration the rumours which are alleged to have prevailed during the reign of King Richard, to the effect that his nephews had been murdered. It is maintained that, as these rumours were generally believed, Richard must have been guilty, because if he had been innocent he would have taken some steps to disprove the rumours, and he took no such steps—or rather no such steps are recorded by his enemies. The points for investigation are whether such rumours actually existed, and if so, whether they were so general as to reach the king's ears, and make it advisable that anything should be done to refute them.

It is alleged that these rumours took shape during the king's progress to York, in the summer and autumn of 1483. It is nowhere alleged that they existed at any other time during Richard's reign. The authority for a rumour about the fate of the two boys in the summer of 1483 is the Croyland Chronicle; and there can be no doubt that the statement was made in good faith, although the writer may have been deceived. The statement is to the effect that the

princes remaining in custody in the Tower, the people in the south and west of England became anxious for their liberation, that meetings were held on the subject, and that proposals were made to arrange the escape of the daughters of Edward IV, so that, if anything happened to his sons, there might still be heirs of his body. It was also reported that the sons of Edward were dead, though it was not known by what violent means they met their ends. So far the Croyland Chronicle.

No doubt there were partisans of the defeated factions of Hastings and the Woodvilles who were ready to spread any rumours injurious to the king. The question is whether the rumours which reached the ears of the Croyland monk were ever generally credited by the people, so as to call for action from the government. Is it true that they led to loud murmurings from meetings and assemblages of the people in the south and west of England, such as would attract general notice? The only proof offered is that an officer named Nesfield was ordered to watch the approaches of the sanctuary at Westminster, and see that no one left it secretly. But this was a precaution which would have been taken under any circumstances. Polydore Virgil alleges that Richard himself spread a report that his nephews were dead. We know how much credit a statement from such a source deserves.

There is besides strong reason for rejecting the monk of Croyland's story. If the rumours had really existed, and if in consequence there were mutinous assemblages of the people pointing to an insurrectionary movement, the vigilant and energetic young king would have made all necessary preparations to meet the danger. Nothing is more certain in his history than that he was taken absolutely by surprise when he received tidings of an outbreak in Kent on October 11, 1483.¹⁸ No previous rumours can have reached him and they must have reached him if they had gained the popular ear. We must, therefore, conclude that there was no rumour that the young princes had been murdered. The Kentish outbreak was part of the plan for an insurrection, arranged by Buckingham and his friends.

Yet the story had certainly been told to the Croyland monk. If it had not reached him as a general rumour, it must have come direct from some malignant enemy of the king. Was there such a man lurking in the fen country round Croyland? We know that Morton had taken refuge in the Isle of Ely at this very time. If that unscrupulous intriguer was at the chronicler's elbow, the story is fully accounted for. The rumours mentioned in the Croyland Chronicle probably originated with Morton when he was hiding in the

¹⁸ 'The intelligence evidently took the king quite by surprise.'—Gairdner's *Richard III*, p. 267.

fens, and ceased to exist when he sailed for Flanders. Morton and his slanders went abroad together. The rumours are heard of no more in England, but as soon as Morton reached the continent they reappeared with him. He left England in the autumn of 1483. In January 1484 the murder of the princes was alleged as a fact by the chancellor of France in addressing the States General at Tours. The chancellor may have been told this by some other Lancastrian exile, but it is more probable that it came from Morton. It was seized upon as a pretext for reviling the English king. Louis XI had hated Richard because he opposed the peace which the French king bought from his brother Edward, and because he disapproved of the consequent desertion of England's ally, the duke of Burgundy. The antipathy was inherited by his daughter, the lady of Beaujeu, who became regent on the death of Louis in August 1483. The calumnious insult to the king of England, uttered by the French chancellor, may not have reached Richard's government. If it did, it must have been apologised for or explained away, for some months afterwards, in July 1486, King Richard received an embassy from the French regency to treat of peace. The calumny originated from the spite of Morton, or some other outlawed malcontent, and not from any general rumour.

Fabyan, writing in the time of Henry VII, talked of a rumour and of its having been the common fame that Richard put his nephews to secret death. But this was really what Henry wanted to be 'common fame,' and no one dared to gainsay it. In the year after his accession the usurping Tudor ordered it to be given out that the boys were murdered by their uncle, and his paid writers had to repeat the statement. André said they were killed with a sword. Rous affirmed that they were put to death by some means unknown. Polydore followed Rous. At the same time both Morton and Polydore Virgil inadvertently furnish evidence that no general belief existed in Richard's reign that the boys were dead. The former says that it remained in doubt whether they were destroyed or not in Richard's days, and the latter mentions a rumour that they had escaped abroad. No question arose before King Richard's death. Many persons must have known that his nephews were alive and well treated. After Henry's accession those who knew the truth had a choice between silence and ruin, or even death. Among the mass of the people there was no knowledge of what had happened. Of course, many baseless rumours then became current. The statements accusing Richard, and the assertions that these rumours received popular credit during his reign, merely indicated what his successor wished to be believed on the subject.

It has been used as an argument against Richard III, that his nephew Richard was duke of Norfolk, and that, as he created

Lord Howard duke of Norfolk, he must have previously murdered his nephew.

John Mowbray, duke of Norfolk, died in 1475, leaving one girl, named Anne, as heiress to the Mowbray estates. Edward IV saw an opportunity of enriching his family; so, on 15 Jan. 1478, his son Richard was contracted in marriage to Anne Mowbray, having previously been created duke of Norfolk and earl of Nottingham, the Mowbray titles. Richard's age was seven, Anne was some years younger. She died in infancy. Lords Howard and Berkeley, sons of sisters of a duke of Norfolk, then became co-heirs of the Mowbray titles and estates. It would have been unjust and impolitic to allow their inheritance to be absorbed by young Richard on the strength of an intended marriage with the deceased child. Richard III simply performed an act of ordinary justice in giving the Mowbray titles to Lords Howard and Berkeley, the heirs of the Mowbray family. The former was made duke of Norfolk, the latter earl of Nottingham.

It is scarcely necessary to urge that this act of justice could be performed without the necessity of murdering the little boy, because the dates of the creations prove that young Richard was alive. The dukedom of Norfolk was conferred upon Lord Howard, and the earldom of Nottingham on Lord Berkeley, on 28 June 1483. It has never been pretended by any writer that the young princes were not alive on that day and for several weeks afterwards. Indeed, their deaths before the coronation of Richard III on 6 July would upset the whole story of their alleged murder by his order.

It cannot, however, be doubted that the young princes were made away with. If King Richard was innocent, Henry Tudor must have been the criminal. After the battle of Bosworth, the lucky adventurer marched on London and seized the government. He then became responsible for the surviving members of the royal family of England, legitimate or otherwise. What did he do with them? There were Edward and Richard, illegitimate sons of Edward IV; there was Edward, the legitimate son of Clarence and rightful king of England; and there was John, the illegitimate son of Richard III. They all fell into his hands, and he alone became answerable for their lives. There is too much reason to believe that they all met with foul play at his hands.

In usurping the crown Henry Tudor found himself in a difficult position. His mother's claim was worthless in itself, and moreover it had not yet descended to him and never did, for she survived him. He wisely refrained from stating such a claim as this, although he alleged a vague hereditary right of some sort which he did not explain. There remained the right of conquest with the aid of French mercenaries, and he ventured to put it forward. But he soon saw that he would have to find some other

prop to support his usurpation. Henry was certainly a man of great ability, with an acute but narrow mind. He was suspicious and a lover of mystery, and not naturally cruel. Indeed he showed natural affection when his own interests were not concerned, and he recoiled from crime. Yet he became capable of any foul deed if he deemed it necessary for his own security. But he meditated over a crime for months and even years, and stood trembling on the brink for a long time, before he summoned up courage to act. Even then he much preferred the forms of law, thinking that if he shared the deed with others, the guilt became less. All that was done by this subtle and cold-blooded tyrant was done deliberately.

Henry had the wisdom to perceive that, although his claim of conquest and vague assertion of hereditary right might serve for a time, he must establish some better title to secure any stability for his throne. There was Elizabeth, the late king's niece, whose person he had secured. If she was made queen it might propitiate the powerful Yorkist party. But she was illegitimate. It is true that all evidence of the illegitimacy might be destroyed, but this would raise another difficulty, for her brothers would become legitimate also. Still he finally resolved upon this course. The act of parliament reciting Richard's title was expunged, and orders were given to destroy all traces of it. But this was not enough. There was other work to be done from which Henry long recoiled. Yet without its perpetration his marriage with Elizabeth would be worse than useless.

His first act, after assembling a so-called parliament of his outlawed adherents, was to pass an act of attainder against King Richard and his chief supporters. It is very significant that, although the late king is here reviled in general terms, he is not directly accused of the murder of his nephews. Henry got possession of the Tower at once. If the young princes had been missing, it is certain that the usurper would have promptly accused King Richard of having murdered them, in the act of attainder. But he did not do so. There can only be one explanation of this omission. The young princes were not missing.

Here then was Henry's great difficulty. This fully accounts for the long delay in marrying Elizabeth. He was afraid. He was ready to commit any crime with the forms of law. But a recourse to law was impossible in this case. Whatever he was to do, must be done in profound secrecy. Yet his timid and superstitious nature shrank from a crime, the responsibility of which he could not share with others. He hesitated for months. All evidence of the illegitimacy had been hidden out of sight. He long stood on the brink. At length he took the plunge. He married Elizabeth on 18 Jan. 1486, nearly five months after his

accession. The die was then cast. It became a matter of life and death to Henry VII that the brothers of his wife should cease to exist.

We must now apply the same tests to Henry as we applied to Richard. Had Henry sufficient motive for the crime? It is impossible that a man in his position could have had a stronger motive. He had denied the illegitimacy and had thus made his wife's brothers his most formidable rivals. He dare not let them live, unless he relinquished all he had gained. The second test we applied to Richard was his treatment of those persons who were in his power, and who might possibly threaten his position. Let us apply the same test to Henry. John of Gloucester, the illegitimate son of Richard III, fell into his hands. At first he received a maintenance allowance of 20*l.* a year.¹⁹ But he was soon thrown into prison, on suspicion of an invitation having reached him to come to Ireland.²⁰ He never came out alive. This active well-disposed boy, as he is described in Rymer's 'Foedera,' fell a victim to the usurper's fears. The earl of Warwick was also in Henry's power. The tyrant hesitated for years before he made up his mind to commit another foul crime. But he finally put the unhappy youth to death, under circumstances of exceptional baseness and infamy. His next supposed danger was caused by the earl of Suffolk, another of King Richard's nephews. This ill-fated prince was delivered into Henry's hands under a promise that his life should be spared. He evaded the promise by enjoining his son to kill him. That son complied, and followed up the death of Suffolk by beheading five other descendants of the Plantagenet royal family. These Tudor kings cannot stand the tests we applied to Richard III, and which he passed unscathed. The conduct of Richard to the relations who were under his protection was that of a Christian king. The executions of which Henry VII and his son were guilty were an imitation of the policy of Turkish sultans.

If the young princes were in the Tower when Henry arrived, his conduct in analogous cases leaves no doubt of their fate. It was the fate of John of Gloucester, of Warwick, and of Suffolk. They may not have been made away with before Henry's marriage, nor for some months afterwards. The tyrant had the will but not the courage. He hesitated long, but, for reasons which will appear presently, it is likely that the boys were murdered, by order of Henry VII, between 16 June and 16 July, 1486.

Then, for the first time, the 'common fame' was ordered to spread the report that King Richard 'had put them under suer kepyng within the Tower in such wise that they never came abrode after,' and that 'King Richard put them unto secrete death.' But Henry feared detection. The mother knew that this was false. If

¹⁹ Rymer, xii. 265.

²⁰ Buck.

the boys were murdered in July 1486, that mother must soon have begun to feel uneasy. She was at Winchester with her daughter when her grandchild Arthur was born on 20 Sept. 1486, and was present at the christening. But she was in London later in the autumn, and before many months her suspicions must have been aroused. She must be silenced. Consequently, in February 1487, 'it was resolved that the Lady Elizabeth, wife of King Edward IV, should lose and forfeit all her lands and possessions because she had voluntarily submitted herself and her daughters to the hands of King Richard. Whereat there was much wondering.' She was ordered to reside in the nunnery of Bermondsey, where she died six years afterwards. Once she was allowed to appear at court on a state occasion. Lingard and Nicolas brought forward a negotiation with the king of Scots, in November 1487, in the course of which Henry proposed that James III should marry Elizabeth Woodville. If he suspected her, they argue, he would not have given her the opportunity of plotting against him as queen of Scotland. Although Henry may have momentarily entertained the idea of getting rid of a woman who knew too much, by this expatriation, he soon changed his mind. She was safer in his power, and the negotiations were broken off. The avowed pretext for her detention was not the real motive, for Henry had made grants of manors to her soon after his accession, when her conduct with regard to Richard was equally well known to him. The real reason was kept secret as well it might be. If the boys ceased to live in July 1486, it was high time for Henry to silence the awkward questions of the mother in the following February. He did so by condemning her to lifelong seclusion in a nunnery.

Years passed on. At length, in 1502 or thereabouts, the first detailed story of the murder of the two princes was put forward, after the execution of Sir James Tyrrel, and was subsequently published by Polydore Virgil. It was to the effect that King Richard sent a messenger to Sir R. Brackenbury, lieutenant of the Tower, with an order to procure the deaths of the princes, before he set out for York. Brackenbury deferred any action until Richard sent Sir James Tyrrel to the Tower, who murdered the children; 'but with what kind of death they were executed is not certainly known.' It is probable that further details were added afterwards, for a much more elaborate fable appeared in the history published by Rastell, and in Grafton. Here it is alleged that 'at the time when Sir James Tyrrel and John Dighton were in prison for treason, they made a confession in August 1483, when on his way to Gloucester, King Richard sent one John Green with a letter to Sir Robert Brackenbury, ordering him to put the boys to death.' It will be observed that here the story of Polydore Virgil has been altered, the place where the king gave the order being changed from London

to the road to Gloucester. Brackenbury refused, as in the former story, and Green returning reported his answer to Richard at Warwick. 'The same night the king said to his secret page, who shall I trust to do my bidding?' The page replied that there was one without who would not refuse. This was Sir James Tyrrel, who was despatched with a letter to Brackenbury to deliver to Sir James all the keys of the Tower for one night. The princes were in charge of Will Slater or Slaughter, called 'Black Will.' Tyrrel appointed one of the jailers named Miles Forest, 'a fellow fleshed in murder aforetime,' and John Dighton, his horsekeeper, to 'commit the murders. Tyrrel caused the bodies to be buried at the stair foot, "metely deep in the ground" under a great heap of stones.' But the king caused their bodies to be removed to another place. Miles Forest, at St. Martin's le Grand, piecemeal rotted away. 'Dighton lived at Calais long after, no less disdained than pointed at.' The narrator concludes: 'Thus as I have learned of them that much knewe and little cause had to lie, were these two princes murdered.' This last sentence is somewhat audacious. They 'that much knewe,' if they ever existed outside the writer's imagination, had very strong cause to lie. The truth, if they knew it, would have been their ruin.

Such is the detailed accusation which was finally put forward. On the face of it there is no confession in this story. It is a concocted tale, and indeed this is admitted. It merely claims to be the most probable among several others which were based on various accounts of the alleged confession. If there ever was a confession, why should there be various accounts of it? It would certainly have been published if it was ever made, and the silence of Fabyan and Polydore Virgil is conclusive against the truth of the story of a confession. It is alleged that Tyrrel and Dighton both confessed. Yet Tyrrel was beheaded for another offence, and Dighton was rewarded with a residence at Calais. If the confessions had ever been made, Tyrrel and Dighton must have been tried and convicted for these atrocious murders, and duly punished. In point of fact Dighton was not arrested with Tyrrel. The names of those who were concerned in Tyrrel's business are given by the chroniclers, and that of Dighton is not one of them.

It is unnecessary to dwell on the absurdities and contradictions in the story itself. But it is worth while to refer to the contention of Sharon Turner and Lingard that the story must be true, on the grounds that the persons mentioned in it were rewarded by King Richard. They mention that Brackenbury and Tyrrel received several grants of land; Green was made receiver of the Isle of Wight and of Porchester, Dighton was appointed bailiff of the manor of

Ayton, Forest was keeper of the wardrobe at Barnard's Castle. All this can easily be answered. Tyrrell and Brackenbury were Yorkist officers of rank, and such grants might have been made to them under any circumstances. As regards the others, either the grants were made previous to the alleged date of the murders, or there is no evidence to show whether they were made before or after, or in any way to connect them with the crime. The statement that Green held the receiverships of the Isle of Wight and Porchester is derived from an unsupported note by Strype, who gives no authority. A man named Dighton was made bailiff of Ayton, but there is nothing to show this appointment was made after the alleged date of the murder. Miles Forest is asserted to have been a jailer in the Tower who was a professional murderer, and rotted away piecemeal at St. Martin's le Grand. These statements are certainly false. Miles Forest was keeper of the wardrobe at Barnard's Castle in Durham, 244 miles from the Tower of London. There he lived with his wife and grown-up son Edward. There is not the slightest reason for believing that Forest entered upon his appointment after the date of the alleged murders, but much to disprove this assumption. He died in September 1484, and, as his wife and son received a pension for their lives, he must have been an old and faithful servant who had held the office for many years.

Dr. Lingard suggested that the pension was granted to the widow because Forest held the post for so short a time, assuming that he was one of the murderers in the story. This is certainly a very odd reason for granting a pension. Miles Forest was a responsible old official in a royal castle, living with his wife and grown-up sons in the far north of England, where he died, and his family received a pension in acknowledgment of his long service. We are asked to believe that he was, at the same time, a notorious murderer who was a jailer in the Tower of London, and that he died in sanctuary at St. Martin's le Grand.

How Forest's name got into the story it is not possible, at this distance of time, to surmise. But the author was quite unscrupulous, and the above considerations justify the conclusion that Forest's name was used at haphazard. There was a desire to give names and other details in order to throw an air of verisimilitude over the fable. We see the same chance adoption of a name in the use of that of Dighton. He was not Tyrrel's horsekeeper, nor probably the actual murderer. But there was a John Dighton living at Calais when the story was made up, who was known to be connected, in some mysterious way, with the disappearance of the princes. So the author of the story hit upon his name to do duty as the groom who did the deed. The name of Forest was doubtless

adopted owing to some similar chance. Neither Forest's nor Dighton's names occurs in the authorised version as given by Polydore Virgil.

Henry at first only accused Tyrrel of the murders, but it seems likely that he subsequently put forward some further details. There is an indication of the Green episode in Polydore Virgil. It is, therefore, probable that it was sanctioned by Henry's authority, as well as the details respecting the interment of the bodies. All the rest about Dighton and Forest, and the way in which the crime was committed, is a fabrication based on the authorised story which is given in Polydore Virgil. The Italian was supplied with the statement sanctioned by the king, and he distinctly tells us that the mode of death was not divulged.

There remains a circumstantial story which may really have been connected with a secret tragedy. It has a very suspicious look of having been parodied out of something which actually happened. It is unlikely to have been pure invention. The fear of detection must have been always haunting Henry's mind. He would be tortured with the apprehension that the vague rumours he had set afloat against Richard were not credited; and this would be an inducement to promulgate a more detailed and circumstantial story. He could not and dared not accuse Tyrrel while he was alive for a reason which will appear directly, but as soon as he was dead it would be safe to do so. At the time when he got rid of Tyrrel his son Arthur had just died. The man's mind would be filled with fears of retributive justice. Then terror of detection would increase upon him. He would long to throw off suspicion from himself by something more decisive than vague rumour. The notion of imputing his own crime, in its real details, to his predecessor, is quite in keeping with the workings of a subtle and ingenious mind such as we know Henry's to have been. Hence Tyrrel, Green, Dighton, and Black Will may have been the accomplices of Henry VII, instead of Richard III. As soon as Tyrrel was disposed of, the circumstantial story might be divulged as his confession, merely substituting the name of Richard for that of Henry, and the name of Brackenbury for that of Digby.

With this clue to guide us, let us see what light can still be thrown on the dark question of the murders. Sir James Tyrrel of Gipping had been a knight of some distinction. He had been on a commission for executing the office of lord high constable under Edward IV. He had also been master of the horse, and was created a knight banneret at Berwick siege. King Richard made him master of the henchmen and conferred several favours on him. But he was not one of the good men and true who stood by their sovereign to the end. His name drops out of history during the last anxious months before Bosworth. He was no doubt a trimmer.

But he could not escape the consequences of his long service under the Yorkist kings. Henry VII deprived him of his chamberlainship of the exchequer, and of his constablership of Newport, in order to bestow those appointments on his own friends. Tyrrel had to wait patiently in the cold shade. But he was ambitious and ready to do a great deal for the sake of the new king's favour. Here was a ready instrument for such a man as Henry Tudor.

The die had been cast. The usurper had married Elizabeth of York and entered upon the year 1486. There was a dark deed which must be done. Henry set out on a progress to York, leaving London in the middle of March. On the 11th of the same month John Green received, from the new king, a grant of a third of the manor of Benyngton in Hertfordshire.²¹ For this favour Green had, no doubt, to perform some secret service which, if satisfactorily executed, would be more fully rewarded. We know from the story what that service was. We also know from the story that Green did not succeed. Henry VII returned from his progress in June, only to find that Green had failed him in his need.

Then Henry (not Richard) may well have exclaimed, 'Who shall I trust to do my bidding?' 'Sir,' quoth a secret councillor (called a page in the story), 'there waiteth without one who I dare well say will do your grace's pleasure.' So Tyrrel was taken into favour, and probably undertook to perform Henry's work with the understanding that he was to receive a sufficient reward. He became a knight of the king's body.²² On 16 June, 1486, Sir James Tyrrel, late of Gipping, received a general pardon.²³ There is nothing extraordinary in this. It was an ordinary practice in those days to grant general pardons on various occasions. But it marks the date when Henry VII found 'one without' who was ready to do his pleasure. Tyrrel, as the story tells us, was given a warrant to the lieutenant of the Tower, conferring on him the needful powers. The murders were then committed, as the story informs us, by William Slater or Slaughter, called 'Black Will,' with the aid of John Dighton. Slater was the jailer. Master John Dighton, however, was not Tyrrel's groom. He was a priest, and probably a chaplain in the Tower. He may have been only an accessory after the fact, in connexion with the interments. The bodies, as we are told in the story, were buried at the stair foot, 'metely deep in the ground, where they were discovered in July 1674.'²⁴ The tale about their removal and the death of the priest was no doubt inserted by Henry to prevent that discovery.

On 16 July, 1486, Sir James Tyrrel received a second general pardon.²⁵ This would be very singular under ordinary circumstances,

²¹ *Materials for a history of the reign of Henry VII*, i. 884.

²² *Ib.* ii. 251.

²³ *Sandford*, v. 404.

²⁴ *Ib.* i. 460.

²⁵ *Mat. for reign of Hen. VII*. i. 503.

the second pardon having been granted within a month of the first. But it is not so singular when we reflect on what probably took place in the interval. There was a crime to be condoned which must be kept a profound secret. Thus we are able to fix the time of the murder of the two young princes, between 16 June and 16 July, 1486. One was fifteen and a half, the other twelve years of age.

Henry had at length found courage to commit the crime. He may have excused it to himself from the absolute necessity of his position. It had been perpetrated in profound secrecy. If the mother, brother, or sisters suspected anything, they could be silenced. They were absolutely at Henry's mercy. The mother was stripped of her property, immured in Bermondsey nunnery, and left dependent on her son-in-law for subsistence. She was effectually silenced. The Marquis of Dorset, half-brother of the murdered boys, was committed to the Tower; but he succeeded in convincing the tyrant that there was nothing to fear from him, and he was eventually released. The eldest sister was Henry's wife and at his mercy—the wife of a man who, as his admirers mildly put it, 'was not uxorious.' She was within two months of her confinement, and doubtless for that reason her mother kept all misgivings to herself. Henry married the next sister Cicely, in that very year, to his old uncle Lord Welles, who would ensure her silence. The other sisters were still children. Others who knew much, and must have suspected more, had the choice between silence and ruin or death.

Yet the guilty tyrant could have known no peace. He must have been haunted by the fear of detection, however industriously he might cause reports to be spread, and histories to be written, in which his predecessor was charged with his crimes. Then there was the horror of having to deal with his accomplices. Here fortune favoured him. Green died in the end of 1486,²⁶ though hush-money seems to have been paid to 'Black Will' for some time longer.²⁷ John Dighton was presented by Henry VII with the living of Fulbeck near Grantham, in Lincolnshire, on 2 May, 1487.²⁸ But he was expected to live on the other side of the channel.

Sir James Tyrrel received ample recompense. He was appointed to the office of constable of Guisnes immediately after the date of his second general pardon. He was sent as ambassador to Maximilian, king of the Romans, to conclude a perpetual league and treaty. In 1487 he received a grant for life of the stewardship of Ogmore in Wales.²⁹ In 1498 he was one of the commissioners for negotiating the treaty of Etaples with France. Henry, although he was obliged to reward his accomplices, was anxious to keep them on

²⁶ *Mat. for reign of Hen. VII*, i. 617.

²⁷ *Ib.* ii. 298.

²⁸ *Ib.* ii. 148.

²⁹ *Ib.* ii. 188.

the other side of the Channel as much as possible. Dighton had to reside at Calais. Tyrrel was induced to make an exchange, giving up his estates in Wales to the king, and receiving revenues from the county of Guisnes of equal value.³⁰ In 1498 Henry still addressed him as his well-beloved and faithful councillor.

The long-sought pretext for getting rid of Tyrrel was found in 1502. The usurper dreaded the earl of Suffolk, King Richard's nephew, as a claimant to the crown. He heard that Tyrrel had favoured the escape of the ill-fated young prince to Germany. Henry would naturally be terrified at the idea of Tyrrel taking the side of another claimant, and publicly denouncing his misdeeds. He ordered the arrest of his accomplice, but Tyrrel refused to surrender the castle of Guisnes. He was besieged by the whole garrison of Calais. Treachery was then resorted to. Deceived by false promises, and the *pulchra verba* of Dr. Fox, lord privy seal, he unwisely put himself in the power of his enemies. He was safely locked up in a dungeon of the Tower, and beheaded without delay, on 6 May, 1502.

At length Henry could breathe freely. Of his accomplices only Dighton remained, who could be useful as a false witness. But the tyrant suffered for his crimes. The secret removal of his wife's brothers, and of young John of Gloucester, did not complete the catalogue. The earl of Warwick was the next victim; for he was a living reminder of his wife's illegitimacy. If Elizabeth had been legitimate, there would have been no danger to Henry from the existence of Warwick. That young prince would have been far removed from the succession. His wife's illegitimacy made her cousin the rightful heir, and hence another crime seemed necessary. Henry delayed its perpetration for years. At length he committed it, at the dictation of Ferdinand of Spain. But remorse gnawed the tyrant's heart. The Spanish ambassador noticed the change that had taken place in Henry's appearance since the murder of young Warwick. Don Pedro de Ayala had been in Scotland during the interval. The king had come to look many years older in a single month. Yet he contemplated another crime to make his position safe. He could not get the earl of Suffolk into his clutches without giving a solemn promise to spare his life. He evaded the promise by enjoining his son to commit the crime. Murderous designs thus occupied his mind on his deathbed.

Henry became haggard and restless. Prosperous and successful as the world deemed him, we may rely upon it that his crimes were not unpunished. His cowardly nature was peculiarly susceptible to the torturing pangs of remorse. He died, full of terrors, prematurely old and worn out, at the early age of fifty-two, on

³⁰ *Mat. for reign of Hen. VII*, ii. 251, 252, 253, 254.

21 April, 1509. He accumulated riches by plunder and extortion. He cleared his path of rivals. He established a despotic government. We are told that he inaugurated a new era—era of benevolences and star-chamber prosecutions. In all these things he was successful as the world counts success. As a slanderer he was pre-eminently successful. He succeeded in blackening the name of a far better man than himself for all time.

CLEMENTS R. MARKHAM.