

XXIX.

BOSWORTH FIELD.—GAIRDNER.

[Edward IV. left two young sons, Edward V. and Richard, duke of York. Their uncle, Richard, duke of Gloucester, was appointed Protector of the Realm, and then claimed the crown on the ground that his nephews were illegitimate. He was crowned July 6, 1483, and soon afterward the young princes disappeared. Though nothing absolutely certain is known as to their fate, it is exceedingly probable that they were murdered by Richard's order. As king, he pursued a conciliatory policy; but there was much disaffection, and it gradually centered around Henry, earl of Richmond, the representative of the Lancastrian line. In 1485 Henry invaded the kingdom, and the two rivals met on Bosworth Field.]



RICHARD III.

By repeated proclamations Richard called upon his subjects to resist the intended invasion of Richmond with all their force. He denounced the earl and his followers as men who had forsaken their true allegiance, and put themselves in subjection to the French king. He pointed out that, owing to the illegitimacy of the Beauforts, Henry could have no claim to the crown, and that even on the father's side he was come of bastard blood. He declared that he had bargained to give up forever all claims hitherto made by the kings of England either to the crown of France, the duchy of Normandy, Gascony, or even Calais. Richmond, however, had sent messages into England by which he was assured of a considerable amount of support; and he borrowed money from the king of France with which he fitted out a small fleet at Harfleur, and embarked for Wales, where his uncle, Jasper Tudor, earl of Pembroke, possessed great influence.

Richard, knowing of the intended invasion, but being uncertain where his enemy might land, had taken up his position in the center of the kingdom. Following a plan first put in use by his brother, Edward, during the Scotch war, he had stationed messengers at intervals of twenty miles along all the principal roads to the coast to bring him early intelligence. But Henry landed at Milford Haven, at the farthest extremity of South Wales, where, perhaps, Richard had least expected him; and so small was the force by which he was accompanied, that the news did not, at first, give the king very much anxiety. He professed great satisfaction that his adversary was now coming to bring matters to the test of battle. The earl, however, was among friends from the moment he landed. Pembroke was his native town, and the inhabitants expressed their willingness to serve his uncle, the earl of Pembroke, as their natural and immediate lord. The very men whom Richard had placed to keep the country against him at once joined his party, and he passed on to Shrewsbury with little or no opposition.

The king's "unsteadfast friendships," on the other hand, were now rapidly working his ruin. His own attorney-general, Morgan Kidwelly, had been in communication with the enemy before he landed. Richard, however, was very naturally suspicious of Lord Stanley, his rival's step-father, who, though he was steward of the royal household, had asked leave, shortly before the invasion, to go home and visit his family in Lancashire. This the king granted only on condition that he would send his son George, Lord Strange, to him at Nottingham in his place. Lord Strange was, accordingly, sent to the king; but when the news arrived of Henry's landing, Richard desired the presence of his father also. Stanley pretended illness, an excuse which could not fail to increase the king's suspicions. His son at the same time made an attempt to escape, and, being captured, confessed that he himself and his uncle, Sir William Stanley, had formed

a project, with others, to go over to the enemy; but he protested his father's innocence, and assured the king that he would obey his summons. He was made to understand that his own life depended on his doing so, and he wrote a letter to his father accordingly.

Richard, having mustered his followers at Nottingham, went on to Leicester to meet his antagonist, and encamped at Bosworth on the night of August 21. The earl of Richmond had arrived near the same place with an army of 5,000 men, which is supposed to have been not more than half that of the king. That day, however, Lord Stanley had come to the earl secretly at Atherstone to assure him of his support in the coming battle. He and his brother, Sir William, were at the head of a force not far off, and were only temporizing to save the life of his son, Lord Strange. This information relieved Henry's mind of much anxiety, for at various times since he landed he had felt serious misgivings about the success of the enterprise. The issue was now to be decided on the following day.

Early in the morning both parties prepared for the battle. Richard arose before day-break, much agitated, it is said, by dreadful dreams that had haunted his imagination in the night-time. But he entered the field wearing his crown upon his head, and encouraged his troops with an eloquent harangue. There was, however, treason in his camp, and many of his followers were only seeking an opportunity to desert and take part with the enemy. A warning, indeed, had been conveyed by an unknown hand to his foremost supporter, the duke of Norfolk, in the following rhyme, which was discovered the night before, written on the door of his tent:

"Jack of Norfolk, be not too bold,
For Dickon, thy master, is bought and sold."

Lord Stanley, who had drawn up his men at about equal distance from both armies, received messages early in the morning from both leaders desiring his immediate assistance.

His policy, however, was to stand aloof to the very last moment; and he replied, in each case, that he would come at a convenient opportunity. Dissatisfied with this answer, Richard ordered his son to be beheaded, but was persuaded to suspend the execution of the order till the day should be decided.

After a discharge of arrows on both sides the armies soon came to a hand-to-hand encounter. Lord Stanley joined the earl in the midst of the engagement, and the earl of Northumberland, on whose support Richard had relied, stood still with all his followers and looked on. The day was going hard against the king. Norfolk fell in the thickest of the fight, and his son, the earl of Surrey, after fighting with great valor, was surrounded and taken prisoner. Richard endeavored to single out his adversary, whose position on the field was pointed out to him. He suddenly rushed upon Henry's body-guard, and unhorsed successively two of his attendants, one of whom, the earl's standard-bearer, fell dead to the ground. The earl himself was in great danger, but that Sir William Stanley, who had hitherto abstained from joining the combat, now endeavored to surround the king with his force of 3,000 men. Richard perceived that he was betrayed, and crying out, "Treason, Treason!" endeavored only to sell his life as dearly as possible. Overpowered by numbers, he fell dead in the midst of his enemies.

The battered crown that had fallen from Richard's head was picked up upon the field of battle, and Sir William Stanley placed it upon the head of the conqueror, who was saluted as king by his whole army. The body of Richard, on the other hand, was treated with a degree of indignity which expressed but too plainly the disgust excited in the minds of the people by his inhuman tyranny. It was stripped naked and thrown upon a horse, a halter being placed round the neck, and in that fashion carried into Leicester, where it was buried with little honor in the Grey Friars' church.

Such was the end of the last king of England of the line of

the Plantagenets. In warlike qualities he was not inferior to the best of his predecessors, but his rule was such as alienated the hearts of the greater part of his subjects, and caused him to be remembered as a monster. In person, too, he is represented to have been deformed, with the right shoulder higher than the left; and he is traditionally regarded as a hunchback. But it may be that even his bodily defects were exaggerated after he was gone. Stories got abroad that he was born with teeth, and hair coming down to the shoulders, and that his birth was attended by other circumstances altogether repugnant to the order of nature. One fact that can hardly be a misstatement is, that he was small of stature—which makes it all the more remarkable, that in this last battle he overthrew, in personal encounter, a man of great size and strength named Sir John Cheyney. He was, in fact, a great soldier-king, in whom alike the valor and the violence of his race had been matured and brought to a climax by civil wars and family dissensions.

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Chapel and Tomb of Henry VII.

PART II.