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OF
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THUCYDIDES, *Hist.* book i. ch. 20.

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DURING ITS PROGRESS,

AND, BY HIS KIND PERMISSION, WAS INTENDED TO BE DEDICATED

TO HIMSELF.

IT IS NOW, ALAS! INSCRIBED

To his Memory.

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AND THE CONDESCENDING KINDNESS WHICH ADDED SO GREATLY TO

THEIR VALUE,

WILL CAUSE HIM TO BE LONG REMEMBERED

BY MANY WHO NOW MOURN THE LOSS OF THEIR FRIEND AND

BENEFACTOR,

BUT BY NO ONE MORE GRATEFULLY

THAN BY

THE AUTHOR.

P R E F A C E .

It has long been acknowledged, that the era of King Richard the Third comprehends the darkest, the most complex, and the worst authenticated portion of the English annals. The general historian, whose course through the middle ages is guided by a long series of trustworthy chroniclers, finds himself, when near the close of that important period, forsaken by the great body of his authorities, and those who remain are swayed by the violent prejudices and strong antipathies which are natural amongst a people who have long been a prey to civil discord. Shrinking from such corrupt and uncertain authority, history becomes silent; she resigns the doubtful and the mysterious to the poet, whose imagination weaves out of such materials the dark and terrible tragedies by which he seeks to awe and to instruct. Thus it has been with the period of Richard the Third. The historian relates comparatively little—the poet is full to overflowing. The former being reduced to chronicle doubts and suspicions, and being compelled to write his meagre narrative from the imperfect statements of timid friends or the slander of triumphant enemies, his work, thus constructed, becomes tame and uninviting; it excites no sympathy, takes no hold upon the public mind, is read and is speedily forgotten. The defeat of the historian is the triumph of the poet. He occupies the vacant field, turns to account the dark hint, the half-breathed suspicion, and, unshackled by chronology, unfettered by any consideration of the credibility of the evidence upon which he relies, he pours into the unoccupied and “too credulous ear” his thrilling and attractive tale. Such must always be the case when history leaves her work to be done by the poet, and such is the precise state of things in the period under present consideration. The genius of Shakspeare seized upon the history of Richard the Third as a vacant possession, and peopled it with beings who have, indeed, historic names, but whose attributed descriptions and actions are, for the most part, the mere imaginings of the bard.

The truth of this representation has long been partially felt by all persons who have investigated the history of those troubled times. Particular facts, nay, considerable portions of the popular belief, have been, from time to time, subjected to examination, and found to be altogether devoid of foundation; and much acute reasoning and profound argument have been bestowed in criticism upon the contradictory and incredible statements of the few authorities that were accessible to the earlier historians of Richard's reign. Doubts have

been openly expressed, and controversy energetically maintained; but disputation is an avenue through which truth, and especially historical truth, is but seldom arrived at: consequently, after many and lengthened discussions from writers of acknowledged ability, the boundaries of the historical and the poetical in the received popular version of the history of Richard the Third remain as indefinite as ever. If the author of the present work had imagined that the course pursued by the zealous inquirers to whom she has alluded was that by which the truth might be discovered, she would have deemed her interference to be in the highest degree presumptuous. If the questions in dispute were to be determined, or could possibly be determined, by acute reasoning or profound philosophical inquiry, she would have shrunk from attempting to exhibit powers to the possession of which she is well aware she cannot pretend; but, it appearing to her that mere argument and discussion were unsatisfactory modes of attempting to determine a doubtful question in history, and that the humble seeker after authorities might in a case like this do better service than the most brilliant or philosophical of speculators, she resolved on collecting from every available source all existing authentic notices, however trivial, of the defamed prince and monarch. Many of them were found in MSS., many were gathered from recent publications bearing on the events of this period, especially the important works edited by Sir Harris Nicolas, G. C. M. G., and those of the Camden Society, which has done and is doing so much for historical literature, and many were so widely scattered, or were deposited in places so unlikely to afford materials for such a purpose, that it is by no means astonishing that they have occasionally escaped the notice of general historians.

When brought together, and placed in opposition to the statements which have so long and so lamentably passed for history, the results were so convincing that the author felt encouraged to submit them to the public. She was well aware that in so doing she should oppose herself to opinions long and deeply rooted—to a part of our national historical belief which it is something like heresy to dispute. But, strong in the power of the evidences she has analyzed, and in the belief that no prejudice can withstand the truth when fairly and simply displayed, she indulges the hope that her unwearied research having fortified her with facts, and her own views being supported by those who rank high in literary fame, she may be shielded from the charge either of defective judgment or of presumption in her bold undertaking.

The favourable opinion of many literary friends possessed of taste and judgment, and the assistance kindly afforded to the author in various ways, have rendered her task less formidable than might have been anticipated from the importance of the subject. To John Bruce, Esq., her obligations are very great, not only for the aid afforded by his acquaintance with the historical literature of the period, but likewise from the kindness with which it has been imparted. To Sir Henry Ellis, K. H.; to Sir Charles George Young,

Garter; to the late lamented Right Honourable Thomas P. Courtenay; to Thomas Duffus Hardy, Esq., Keeper of Records in the Tower; and to John Bowyer Nichols, Esq.; she is greatly indebted;—to some of them for important facts, to others for their ready help afforded to her when seeking for information. Nor can she omit expressing her thanks to Sir William Heygate, Bart., Thomas Pares, Esq., and those other kind and zealous friends who facilitated the accomplishment of her wish to examine personally the present state of the several places connected with the closing scenes of King Richard's career, especially Bosworth Field, Nottingham Castle, and the localities in Leicester, and its vicinity,—localities on which history, poetry, and the drama have combined to cast an imperishable interest. The author cannot, however, but feel timidity in presenting to the public a work which, although the result of great toil and labour to herself, must of necessity war with so many prejudices, that the first effort to shake them can scarcely hope to be received with favour. Still, unless it be considered advisable that, because errors and mis-statements have been promulgated in less enlightened times, and been received in succeeding ages as historical facts, they should continue to be perpetuated in spite of all the evidence which modern research has rendered available for their refutation,—unless this be thought advisable, she hopes to receive a patient and candid hearing. If the task had fallen into abler hands, it might have led to results which she cannot anticipate as likely to arise from her own weak efforts. A mind more profound might have applied her materials in a variety of ways which have probably escaped her notice; but she trusts that the importance of her theme will procure her work an indulgent reception from the reading portion of the community, and qualify with the more learned the defects of its execution. Attention being drawn to the subject, a sense of justice may gradually pervade the public at large; and, by the aid of other and abler pens, King Richard's character be ultimately rescued from imputations which rest upon grounds as shallow and untenable as that of his personal deformity. In this way the fabulous tales which have been long associated with his memory will be weeded from the pages of history, and his character as a prince be rescued from those unjust charges which alone derogate from the acknowledged superiority of his regal career.

Newlan House, Lymington,
May 1, 1844.