

But, admitting the truth of the long-received tradition, that Edward of Lancaster was taken a prisoner; nay, even more, that he was brought into the king's tent, and therefore, if massacred, may still be said, by a flower of speech, to have been "slain in the field;" there yet remains not a shadow of proof for fixing so foul an act on the young Richard of Gloucester.

Fabyan, the earliest authority for the young prince being assassinated, makes no mention of the perpetrator of the crime being Richard of Gloucester. His version of the tale is, that the king "there strake him with his gauntlet upon the face, after which stroke by him received, he was by the king's servants incontinently slain."* Neither of the royal dukes is named by him even as present at the time, although the monarch would of course be surrounded by his military retinue. If the vanquished and unhappy prince boldly defied and proudly rebuked the king, Edward the Fourth's well-known impetuosity of temper and vindictive conduct to his enemies would most probably induce the stroke in the fury of the moment, and the king's servants would as promptly obey the signal it implied for dispatching so formidable a rival; but there is no pretence for making either of the royal dukes the agent of so murderous a deed, and least of all Richard, Duke of Gloucester. The chivalric education of the times, although it did not inculcate the sparing the life of an opponent, most undoubtedly made it a blot on a knightly escutcheon to dispatch a fallen and unarmed foe; and up to this period Richard's conduct had been singularly consistent and noble; nor was it likely that he would tarnish the renown he had so recently sought and won, by slaying in cold blood a prostrate and defenceless enemy.

Other and valuable modern testimony might be adduced to demonstrate the groundless nature of the charge which has been so long associated with Gloucester's memory; but reference to his own times, to the precise period when the calumnies arose, and to the cause that led to an accusation so wholly unsupported by cotemporaneous accounts, whether Yorkists or Lancastrian, is of itself the best and most substantial proof that the odium incurred by King Richard III. towards the close of his life, or rather the prejudices that prevailed against him after death, inclined the chroniclers of the succeeding age to associate his name indiscriminately with every unworthy act which was committed during his lifetime, rather than from having solid authority for such charges, or testimony to support them based on any valid source.

"There is little in reason," observes the late lamented Mr. Courtney, who, in his "Commentaries on Shakspeare's Historical Plays," has bestowed infinite labour and research in seeking the earliest original authorities, "for believing any part of the story."... "It is quite clear," he adds, "that there is nothing like evidence either of Prince Edward's smart reply to the king, or of his assassination by anybody; and there is not even the report of *one who lived near to the time*, of the participation of either of the king's brothers in the assassination, *if it occurred*." Truly, if the commentator of our great dramatic bard could afford to make this admission of the corrupt source whence the poet drew the material for one of his most admirable and striking scenes, and found sufficient cause to hazard an opinion so decided, arising from a conviction of its truth, the historian; professing to discard romance, and to be guided alone by plain, simple and well-authenticated facts, may well be content to divest his mind of long-received impressions, if they rest on no firmer basis than the legendary tales that reduce the important records of our country to the same level with the fables of early days and the traditions of later but even more dark and uncivilized times. How far King

* Fabyan, p. 662.

Edward himself was concerned in the massacre of the Lancastrian prince, it is not essential to this memoir to inquire;* but his revengeful conduct to his foes is unhappily made but too apparent in the occurrence which followed up his victory, and which not only darkened his own military fame, but casts a shade over that of his young brother, whom the king appointed his viceroy to carry into effect his faithless and cruel condemnation of those brave knights who had trusted to his royal pledge of safety and forgiveness.†

Such of the defeated Lancastrians as were enabled to effect their escape, sought refuge in a religious asylum at Tewkesbury, whither King Edward proceeded, sword in hand, to complete the fearful carnage of the day; but his progress was stayed by the abbot, at whose solemn intercession he was induced to respect the holy privilege of a sanctuary,‡ and to conclude his victory by promising that the lives should be spared of all such as were sheltered within the abbey: but, speedily repenting him of his lenity, he delegated the Duke of Gloucester, as high constable, in conjunction with the Duke of Norfolk, as lord marshal of England, a military tribunal;§ and commanding, as was ever his wont, that the soldiery should be spared, he enjoined the execution of their leaders,|| the Lord Somerset, the Prior of St. John's and fourteen other of the noble partisans and chief supporters of the ex-queen and her princely son; who were consequently beheaded in the market-place of Tewkesbury on the Monday following the battle. Tranquillity, however, was not yet insured to King Edward or the line of York. Leaving as competent judges two of the highest officers of the realm, in the persons of the Lords of Gloucester and Norfolk, to decide the doom of his victims at Tewkesbury, the monarch proceeded with speed to Coventry, in order to quell the farther progress of the insurgents in the north. There, Margaret of Anjou was delivered into his hands a prisoner, having been captured in a church adjoining Tewkesbury, with the ladies of her suite, shortly after the engagement;¶ but before she could be conveyed by Edward's command a captive to the Tower, such intelligence reached the victorious monarch as compelled him in all haste to proceed in person to the metropolis,** whither the bereaved queen was conveyed in triumph as part of his train—alike the sport of fortune and the victim of the disastrous period in which she lived.

During the brief restoration of Henry VI., and upon the attainder of Richard, Duke of Gloucester, the Earl of Warwick had nominated as vice-

* Amongst the most prevalent rumours connected with this mysterious and tragical event, is one, on the authority of Hall, (p. 301,) stating that Prince Edward was taken on the field by Sir Richard Croft, and delivered a prisoner to the king, in consequence of a proclamation offering a reward of 100*l.* per annum to whosoever should yield up the prince, dead or alive, accompanied by an assurance that his life should be spared.

Habington, who relates the same tale, adds, (p. 96,) that upon the assassination of the royal captive, "the good knight repented what he had done, and openly professed his service abused and his faith deluded."

This Sir Richard Croft was the same individual respecting whom King Edward wrote in his boyhood, complaining to his father of his "odious rule and governance." Certain it is, that the knight devoted himself to the interests of the House of York so long as they held the sceptre, and that his services were estimated and rewarded by the monarchs of that race; for after the accession of Edward IV. he was appointed general receiver of the earldom of March; and upon the elevation of King Richard to the throne, he granted "to Richard Croft, Knight, an annuity of 20*l.* of the lordships and manors of the earldom of March, within the county of Hereford."—*Retrospective Review*, second series, vol. i. p. 472; *Harl. MSS.*, 433, p. 665.

† Fleetwood's Chron., p. 31.

‡ Habington, p. 95.

§ Fleetwood's Chron., p. 31.

|| Warkworth's Chron., p. 65.

¶ Tewks. Chron., Harl. MS. 545, p. 102.

** Habington, p. 94.

admiral of the English Channel, his near kinsman, Thomas Neville, the illegitimate son of his uncle, Lord Falconberg, and consequently known in history as "the bastard of Falconbridge."*

The turbulent spirit of the "king maker," unaccompanied, however, with his nobleness of character, was inherited by this corrupt scion of the House of Neville; and feeling that his distinguished command was forfeited by the decisive battle of Barnet and the restoration of the line York, Falconbridge forthwith turned freebooter and pirate,† and directed his attention to change the face of affairs by boldly attempting to surprise London and release Henry VI. from captivity,‡ whilst Edward IV. was opposing his heroic queen and quelling the Lancastrian insurrection in the western and northern districts of the kingdom. The battle of Tewkesbury took place on the 4th of May, 1471, on the 11th of which month the ex-queen was delivered by Sir William Stanley a prisoner to the king at Coventry.§ On the 12th instant, Falconbridge attacked London;|| and on the 16th, the king, changing his purposed course to the north, quitted Coventry¶ without delay, and summoning to his aid Richard of Gloucester, and carrying with him the desolate and childless Margaret, the two brothers, on the 21st instant, entered the metropolis in triumph.** So rapid were the movements, so momentous the events that were crowded into the brief space of seventeen days!

After consigning their illustrious captive to the Tower, there to be immured a prisoner, under the same walls which had so long held in thralldom her hapless consort, the royal Edward and his young brother, resting but one day in the metropolis, left it again on the 23d for Canterbury; the rebel and his lawless adherents having retired to Sandwich on hearing of the king's approach to oppose them.

Finding he had no chance of success in his wild and desperate project, Falconbridge made overtures for submission; offering to surrender up his vessels and his forces, if pardon were extended towards him. The Duke of Gloucester, ever firm to his allegiance and ever at the king's right hand ready to aid him by his courage or his counsels, saw the policy of converting into an ally so formidable and powerful a foe††—one who had at his command forty-seven ships and was at the head of 17,000 men. "Wherefore," says the chronicler, "the king sent thither his brother, Richard, Duke of Gloucester, to receive them in his name and all the ships;‡‡ as he so did the 26th day of the same month, (May, 1471,) the king that time being at Canterbury." This embassy brings to notice another of those unsupported charges which have been directed against and weigh so heavily upon the reputation of Richard, heaping on his devoted head every unworthy deed and suspected treachery of the king, his brother.

Falconbridge was pardoned and permitted even to depart for the fensatory demesnes of the House of Neville, in the north; but in the Michaelmas following, it appears that he was put to death and "his head set on London Bridge looking into Kentward."§§

This act has been fixed as a stigma on the Duke of Gloucester, because, in the month of May, by command of the king, he bore to the rebels his sovereign's forgiveness; and in the September following, no doubt for some fresh delinquency, enforced the subsequent order for his execution in the north. No consideration has been bestowed on the length of time which

* Paston Letters, vol. ii. p. 75.

† Bayley's Hist. of the Tower, vol. iv. p. 329.

‡ Fleetwood, p. 32.

** Fleetwood, p. 32.

§§ Paston Letters, vol. ii. p. 82.

|| Ibid.

¶ Ibid. p. 33.

† Hab. Ed. IV., p. 101.

‡ Ibid.

†† Ibid. p. 39.

elapsed between the two decrees; neither has another point ever been noticed, namely, the utter absence of all power possessed by the prince to nullify any after and requisite severity of the reigning monarch, as to cancel the mandate which was decided upon by the king and his council. If perjury was exercised towards Falconbridge, it rests with King Edward, and not with an agent so powerless as regards actual authority as was his young brother.

Some light is thrown on this matter by the Paston Correspondence, in which passages occur clearly implying that King Edward was the aggrieved party, and not his rebellious and unworthy kinsman,* whose pardon was followed up by such special marks of favour, as thoroughly to controvert the long-received tradition of perfidious cruelty, imputed chiefly, and most unwarrantably, to Richard, Duke of Gloucester. "Falconbridge," says Sir John Fenn,† "after he had submitted, was not only pardoned, but knighted and again appointed vice-admiral. This happened in May, 1471, but was of short continuance; for between the 13th and 29th of September following, he was beheaded, though whether for a fresh crime or not, is uncertain." Here is evidence—derived from a cotemporary source—which is utterly at variance with the hearsay reports of later times: and when the conduct of Falconbridge is considered,—that he was "a man of loose character," the leader of "mischievous persons,"‡ and that consideration is bestowed, likewise, on the desperate spirit that marked every branch of the proud, unbending and restless Nevilles,—little doubt can remain of some fresh crime having been committed, some rebellious feeling manifested by the same delinquent who was pardoned in the spring of the year in Kent, but afterwards beheaded in the autumn of the same year in Yorkshire.§ The distant period, indeed, of his execution itself removes all just charge of participation in the act from the Duke of Gloucester, who, by the records of the time, is only named, in the first instance, as the bearer of a general amnesty from his sovereign to the rebels, because, as stated by Habington, "his wisdom and valour had wrought him high in the opinion of the king."

Can it be reasonably doubted, then, that the same qualifications induced Edward to dispatch Gloucester to the north, if any fresh rise was threatened, or new conspiracy discovered, in one to whom so much lenity had been shown, but who was now to receive condemnation at his hands through the medium of the same agent, the high constable of England, if abuse of that pardon so recently bestowed had now rendered him unworthy of further consideration?

During the interval, however, which elapsed between the battle of Tewkesbury and the quelling of the insurrection of Falconbridge at Sandwich, an event occurred of far darker import—that, indeed, which, with one exception, has contributed, more than all others, to sully the reputation of the Duke of Gloucester and which has handed down his name with horror and detestation to posterity: this event is the mysterious death of the unhappy and care-worn Henry VI.

The decease of this monarch, like that of many of his royal predecessors, and, indeed, of almost every public character of those direful times, was alleged to have been accelerated by violence. The poisoned bowl, the secret assassin, or the more cool and calculating murderer, is each by turn brought forward to account for the death of every remarkable person that flourished in this or the preceding century. Necromancy and magic were

* Falconbridge was first cousin to King Edward, and own nephew (although ignobly born) to the Lady Cecily, being the natural son of her second brother.

† Paston Letters, vol. ii. p. 75.

‡ Wark. Chron., p. 20.

§ Ibid.

fitting accompaniments to these dark times; and superstition cast a veil over the whole by spreading reports and inducing belief in tales unworthy the notice of history, as incompatible both with the laws of nature and of reason.

On how much or how little truth the reports of these violent deaths generally are founded, it is, at this distant period, utterly impossible to ascertain; but the lawless spirit of the age, it must be acknowledged, admits of little doubt as regards the greater proportion of them, and, perhaps, of none more so than that at present under consideration.

On the morning after King Edward the Fourth's triumphant entry into the metropolis, Henry VI., his meek and suffering rival, was found lifeless in the Tower; and towards the close of the same day—that which preceded the departure of the victorious monarch into Kent—the corpse of Henry of Lancaster, “upon a bier, and about the bier more glaives and staves than torches,”* was brought from the Tower to St. Paul's, and there publicly exposed to view preparatory to being conveyed to Chertsey for interment.

There were too many political motives for the expediency of the royal captive's death, not to favour the suspicion that it was hastened by violence; and a very cursory view of the leading crimes and miseries of those fearful times will show that political expediency was, in fact, the foundation of almost all the dark and daring deeds that sullied that degenerate era. Every malevolent and ireful feeling was doubtless rekindled in Edward's heart, by the attempt of Falconbridge to release the Lancastrian monarch; and also by his setting fire to the metropolis. To the ill-timed insurrection, then, of this daring character, there is strong reason to conclude may, at least in a great degree, be ascribed the sudden and premature death of Henry VI. Warwick, the king-maker, was slain, and Margaret of Anjou was a prisoner and childless; the young Prince of Wales was numbered with the dead, and the ex-king himself was not only in close confinement, but alike incapable of active measures, whether in mind or body. Yet Falconbridge had proved, within eight days of the battle of Barnet, and almost before Warwick's unquiet spirit rested in the silent tomb, that the daring temperament of this mighty chief yet lived in his kinsman, and that King Henry's name alone was sufficient to render Edward's throne unstable.‡

The vindictive feeling which influenced this sovereign's military conduct to those opponents who thwarted his views or opposed his ambition, when coupled with such palpable cause for indignation,|| affords the strongest ground for believing that the death of his unhappy rival was a matter previously determined upon by the Yorkist monarch, even if, as was alleged, nature, worn-out and exhausted, had really anticipated the decree by a tranquil and natural dissolution.¶

* Cott. MSS., Vitell. A. xvi. fol. 133.

† “So that, right in a short time, the said bastard and his fellowship had assembled to the number of xvj or xvij m men, as they accounted themselves. Which came afore London the xij day of May, in the quarrel of King Henry, whom they said they would have out of the Tower of London, as they pretended.”—*Fleetwood's Chron.*, p. 334.

‡ In “three places were fires burning all at once.”—*Ibid.*, p. 37.

§ “The commons entering thus upon every slight invitation into rebellion, when the preservation of King Henry was but mentioned, made the king begin to consider how dangerous his life was to the state, and that his death would disarm even the hope of his faction for ever reflecting more upon the wars.”—*Habington*, p. 103.

|| “Wherefore the bastard loosed his guns into the city, and burnt at Aldgate and at London Bridge; for the which burning the commons of London were sore wroth and greatly moved against them; for and they had not burnt the commons of the city would have let them in, maugre of the Lord Scale's head, the mayor and all his brethren.”—*Warkworth's Chron.*, p. 19.

¶ *Fleet. Chron.*, p. 38.

But the fate of the hapless Henry—whatever it may have been—and the character and policy of the ruthless Edward, are not subjects for discussion in these pages; it is the part which is said to have been acted by Richard, Duke of Gloucester, to which attention is to be directed, he having been unsparingly vilified as the actual murderer of the inoffensive monarch, without any one single document being extant to warrant the imputation, or even to afford reasonable ground of belief for so hateful, indeed, so altogether unnecessary, a crime.

It is not, as was before observed, by reference to later chroniclers, or from the positive assertions of after ages, that this important question should be tried; because in this case, as in the reputed massacre by Gloucester, of Edward, Prince of Wales, the implication, commencing at first with the ambiguous terms “it is said,” or “as the fame ranne,” and ending, at last, in decided and positive assertion of the fact, can be gradually and clearly traced. Much as these inaccuracies in our national annals are to be deplored, yet it is an evil well known and acknowledged; and so imperfect and contradictory are the statements, as relates to this period of history, by such as are termed the “Tudor historians,” that on many matters of vast import scarcely two agree, from the mania that prevailed of inserting mere hearsay evidence, and thus adding, without competent authority, to the original manuscripts from which they professed to copy.

It is from annalists who were living at the period when the event occurred that the truth can alone be elicited, and these resolve themselves into three: viz., the two small fragments already quoted, under the title of Fleetwood's and Warkworth's Narrative, and the able ecclesiastical historian, the Chronicler of Croyland. These three writers penned the events which they record before the persecuted Henry for his piety and moral virtues was looked upon by the multitude as a martyr, and sought to be canonized as a saint, and also before Richard III., for the indulgence of political spleen, was held up to unqualified execration, alike to gratify the reigning sovereign as to extenuate his seizure of the crown. The statements of these three coeval writers are as follows:—The Yorkist narrative, after detailing the imprisonment of Queen Margaret, the death of the young prince and the total discomfiture of the Lancastrians, thus describes the death of the unhappy monarch:—“The certainty of all which came to the knowledge of the said Henry, late called king, being in the Tower of London: not having afore that knowledge of the said matters, he took it to so great despite, ire and indignation, that of pure melancholy he died, the 23d day of the month of May.”*

Now nothing could be more probable than such a result, considering the revulsion of fortune which had agitated the infirm and feeble monarch during the recent six months; the more so when it is also remembered, that throughout the vicissitudes of his troubled life, affection to his wife and love for his child were leading features in his amiable character, and amongst the earliest indications which he gave on a former occasion of returning reason after months of hopeless and distressing imbecility.

But, plausible as is the account just narrated of his decease, the circumstance of his being discovered dead on the only day that King Edward was in London,† united to the fact of that monarch having so recently placed Henry in a position of such peril at Barnet that his preservation seemed little less than miraculous,‡ and of his having written to the Duke of Clarence (even when uncertain of the result of that engagement) “to keep

* *Fleet. Chron.*, p. 38.

† See Appendix Y.

‡ “The king, incontinent after his coming to London, tarried but one day, and went with his whole army after his said traitors into Kent.”—*Fleet. Chronicle*, p. 38.

§ *Warkworth*, p. 17.

King Henry out of sanctuary,"* affords, to say the least, more than ordinary ground of suspicion that the death of the captive sovereign was hastened by unfair and violent means. It also induces strong presumptive proof that the Lancastrian account, thus related by Warkworth, approaches nearest to the truth:—"And the same night," says that writer, "that King Edward came to London, King Henry, being inward in prison in the Tower of London, was put to death, the 21st day of May, on a Tuesday night, betwixt 11 and 12 of the clock."†

The extraordinary minuteness with which the murder is here described renders this opposite account almost as suspicious as did the entire suppression by the Yorkist chronicler of the popular reports connected with the suspected murder, unless, indeed, Dr. Habington's clear and explicit statement in his *Life of King Edward IV.* is received as the true version of this mysterious event, in which case the discrepancies of the opposing chroniclers may be completely reconciled. "It was, therefore, resolved in King Edward's cabinet council, that to take away all title from future insurrections, King Henry should be sacrificed."‡ This resolution, incredible as it appears, would hardly have been asserted by the biographer of the Yorkist monarch, unless he had positive proof of an accusation so prejudicial to the character of Edward IV.

But, however well authenticated the fact, such an avowal would have been very unsafe in an acknowledged follower of the House of York§ during the life of King Edward, although it was imperative on him and the cotemporary writers to furnish some cause for the sudden death of Henry VI. Hence the specious account given in Fleetwood's *Chronicle* of this appalling act; hence the veil scrupulously drawn over the harrowing facts which Warkworth, uninfluenced by fear of the populace, and unrestrained by the patronage of the king, so minutely details: for it can scarcely be imagined, excepting it had been a decree of the state, that any individual but the actual assassin could be in possession of such accurate information as that above given by the Lancastrian chronicler; nor does it seem natural that, if in possession of the entire truth, he should in a mere private diary, have disclosed so much, and yet have withheld the name of the murderer, unless, indeed, he knew it to have been commanded by the king himself.¶ Here the additional evidence of the third cotemporary, the prior of Croyland, becomes most important; for his description not only confirms the fact of Henry's death having been accelerated by violence, but his guarded expression gives but too much ground for believing that he considered it was the act of King Edward. "During this interval of time," he says, "the body of King Henry was found lifeless in the Tower: may God pardon and give time for repentance to that man, whoever he was, that dared to lay his sacrilegious

* Leland, *Collect.*, vol. ii. p. 108.

† Warkworth, p. 21.

‡ Habington, p. 103.

§ The author of Fleetwood's *Chronicle* says of himself, that he was a servant of Edward IV., and that he "presently saw in effect a great part of his employtes, and the residue knew by true relation of them that were present at every tyme."—Page 1.

¶ From such a source there might have arisen danger in an alleged imputation; but as regards the Duke of Gloucester, he was far too powerless at this time for such a matter to have been concealed, if he perpetrated it so publicly and undisguisedly as to be known in all its particulars to the principal of a college at Cambridge; for the learned doctor, the author of the above-quoted chronicle, was no courtier, no statesman, but the quiet, unpretending, but studious master of St. Peter's College, Cambridge, from 1473 to 1478.—See Introduction to his *Diary*, by J. O. Halliwell, Esq., p. xxi.

hands upon the Lord's anointed! The *doer* may obtain the name of a tyrant; the *sufferer*, of a glorious martyr."*

Surely the very circumstance of the prominent actors being brought into such juxtaposition would show that the learned ecclesiastic alluded to the rival monarchs themselves, designating one as the "tyrant," the other as the "glorious martyr."

But this able writer, though evidently favouring the belief of foul treatment to the helpless captive, gives no opening whatever for imputing the murder to Richard, Duke of Gloucester; neither can any such accusation be gathered from the other two chroniclers, or from Habington's admission of the horrible fact. This latter historian, indeed, although generally inimical to Gloucester, bestows great pains in showing the utter improbability of his being, in any way, connected with the transaction. "For however some, either to clear the memory of the king, or by after cruelties, guessing at precedents, will have this murder to be the sole act of the Duke of Gloucester, I cannot believe a man so cunning in declining envy, and winning honour to his name, would have taken such a business of his own counsel, and executed it with his own hands; neither did this concern Gloucester so particularly as to engage him alone in the cruelty, nor was the king so scrupulous, having commanded more unnecessary slaughters, and from his youth been never any stranger to such executions."†

Strong language this for the biographer of Edward IV., the more so as it was penned long after Richard's political enemies had distinctly charged him with the crime, and that Shakspeare‡ had made his perpetration of the murder the subject of two of the most powerful scenes in his tragedies of Henry VI. and Richard III.§ A passage in Warkworth,¶ which, if rightly interpreted, is altogether unconnected with King Henry's death, will probably explain the origin of this crime having been laid to the charge of the Duke of Gloucester. After describing the murder in the words recently quoted, he adds, "being then at the Tower, the Duke of Gloucester, brother to King Edward, and many other."¶ But why was Richard there? and who were the "many other" then at the Tower? No less illustrious personages than the whole of the royal family, the court, and the council** who are said to have decreed King Henry's murder! Fleetwood's *Chronicle*—written,

* Chron. Croyl., p. 557.

† Habington, p. 103.

‡ See Courtenay's *Commentaries*, vol. ii. p. 72.

§ See Third Part of Henry VI., Act V., Scene VI.; and Richard III., Act I., Scene II.

¶ Leland, in his *Collectanea*, published at the commencement of the 16th century, quoted extensively from Warkworth's *Chronicle*. He narrated the circumstances of Henry's death as detailed in that manuscript, and inserted the passage here alluded to.—See *Lel. Collect.*, vol. ii. p. 507. Now Leland was cotemporary with Polydore Virgil, Sir Thomas More, Hall and other writers unfriendly to Richard's memory; and his works were published at the precise period that report began to implicate Richard of Gloucester as the murderer of Henry VI. The circumstance, therefore, of this prince being named in a coeval manuscript as at the Tower, where the monarch was discovered lifeless, afforded a fair ground for his enemies to assert as a fact that which had hitherto been reported without a shadow of proof.

¶ "And the same night that King Edward came to London, King Henry, being inward in prison in the Tower of London, was put to death, the 21st day of May, on a Tuesday night, betwixt eleven and twelve of the clock, being then at the Tower the Duke of Gloucester, brother to King Edward, and many other; and on the morrow he was chested and brought to Paul's, and his face open that every man might see him."—*Wark. Chron.*, p. 21.

** "The Lord Scales," more properly designated in Fleetwood's *Chronicle* as the Lord Rivers, from his having succeeded to his father's title before this insurrection, "and divers other of King Edward's council that were in London."—*Warkworth*, p. 20.

be it remembered, upon the spot, immediately after the events to which it relates, by some person possessed of full means of knowledge*—affords this important information:—"Over came from London," he states, when narrating the particulars of Falconbridge's insurrection, "fresh tidings to the king from the lords and the citizens, which with great instance moved the king in all possible haste to approach and come to the city to the defence of the queen, then being in the Tower of London, my lord prince and my ladies his daughters, and of the lords, and of the city, which, as they all wrote, was likely to stand in the greatest jeopardy that ever they stood."†

If King Edward, as is known to be the case, rested in London but one clear day;‡ if his royal consort, his infant progeny, and trusty friends were so perilously situated that he was summoned instantly to their aid, and felt it necessary to dispatch "a chosen fellowship out of his host afore his coming, to the number of xv^e. men, well besene for the comfort of the queen," can it be doubted that the Tower of London, in which she was abiding, would be the place to which King Edward would naturally direct his own footsteps; and that, limited to a few hours, wherein to recruit his strength, to dispense rewards to his faithful citizens,§ and to arrange his movements prior to marching into Kent the following day, the national fortress, where the queen and the court were assembled, would be the abiding place of Edward IV., although it might have been hazardous to couple his name more closely with so suspicious and revolting a transaction as the murder of Henry VI? The Tower of London was not, at this period, merely a state prison; it was the metropolitan palace,|| the ordinary residence of our monarchs at periods of insurrection and danger:¶ and King Edward IV. is most particularly instanced as holding his court here with truly regal splendour, and as choosing it for the abode of his royal consort, during the memorable events that led to their painful separation.**

The Duke of Gloucester appears at this period to have had no distinct resi-

* Bruce's Introd., p. 5.

† Fleet. Chron., p. 34.

‡ There is a slight discrepancy as to date in the Yorkist and Lancastrian chroniclers; Fleetwood fixing the date of King Henry's death on the 23d May, Warkworth on the 22d. But as both these writers agree that Edward remained in London but one clear day, the which was the festival of the Ascension, and that the unhappy monarch was found lifeless at the dawn, and exhibited as dead to the populace at St. Paul's towards the close of the same holy festival, the inaccuracy can only be ascribed to the carelessness, as regards dates, which characterized those early chroniclers; for Fabian, who is very accurate respecting matters which occurred in London, corroborates the assertion of Warkworth, that the corpse of Henry VI. was exhibited to public view at St. Paul's on Ascension eve. The Croyland continuator gives no distinct date; but the commencement of his mysterious and ambiguous account—"I forbear to say that at this time the body of King Henry the VI. was found lifeless in the Tower,"—strengthens considerably the inference that his forbearance had reference to Edward IV.

§ "On the morrow that the king was come to London, for the good service that London had done him, he made knights of the aldermen Sir John Stokston, Sir Rauf Verney, Sir Richard Lee, Sir John Young, Sir Wm. Tayliow, Sir Geo. Ireland, Sir John Stoker, Sir Matthew Philip, Sir Wm. Hampton, Sir Thos. Stalbroke, Sir John Crosby, Sir Thomas Urswicke, recorder of London."—*Warkworth*, p. 21.

|| "The buildings of the palace were then in a perfect state, and frequently inhabited by the royal family."—*Bayley's Hist. Tower*, Part I. p. 262.

¶ "During the insurrection of Wat Tyler, King Richard II. took refuge here with all his court, and the principal nobility and gentry, to the amount of 600 persons."—*Brayley's Londoniana*, vol. i. p. 94.

** "Edward IV. frequently kept his court in the tower with great magnificence; and in 1470, during the temporary subversion of his power, it formed the chief residence of his queen."—*Bray. Lond.*, vol. i. p. 94.

dence in the metropolis, but to have been altogether domesticated with King Edward and his court, both prior to his exile and up to that monarch's restoration to the throne.* Consequently there was nothing remarkable in the young prince being associated with the rest of the royal family at the Tower during the solitary day in which he halted in town, prior to marching into Kent on the "morrow,"† to aid his royal brother in quelling the revolt that had so suddenly called them from the west. Nay, the very safeguard of the queen and her infants, the security of the king and his council, would point it out as the place, under any circumstances, which would naturally have been appropriated to Gloucester and a chosen band of faithful followers, apart from every political plot or scheme secretly devised by Edward IV.

There is also another and an important circumstance which ought not to be overlooked. Richard of Gloucester had no command within the Tower, no power over its inmates: so far from it, the governorship was held at that period by the Lord Rivers;‡ and owing to the jealousy which existed between the queen's connections and the king's family, the Duke of Gloucester had perhaps even less means of access to the royal prisoner than the "many other," whoever they might be, who are named by Warkworth as "being then at the Tower" in conjunction with himself; setting aside the publicity that must have been given to any forcible or violent intruders upon the imprisoned monarch, by reason of his being personally attended by two esquires,§ Robert Ratchiffe and William Sayer, there placed with eleven other attendants equally to guard so important a captive, as ostensibly to pay him the respect which was due to his former regal state.

King Edward, indeed, was deeply interested in the death of Henry VI., for the Lancastrian monarch alone stood between him and undisputed possession of the sceptre of England.|| Not so his young brother of Gloucester: the one had almost regained the object of his ambition; the other had only just entered upon his public career. In addition to this, since King Edward's expulsion from the throne, Richard was altogether removed from succession to the crown, a direct male heir to the house of which he was the youngest member having been borne to King Edward during his brief exile in Burgundy.

Thus the ambitious views which made later writers ascribe the murder to Gloucester, arising from the prejudice which attached to him in consequence of subsequent events, indicate most clearly that this prince was judged of in this matter rather by the odium that attached to Richard III. in his character as a king, than from any reports cotemporary with his career as Duke of Gloucester.

In short, the accusations against this prince do not rest upon any imputation

* See various brief but conclusive notices in Hearne's Fragment, the Paston Correspondence, and other cotemporary sources.

† Wark. Chron., p. 21.

‡ "The Earl Rivers, that was with the queen in the Tower of London."—*Fleetwood's Chron.*, p. 37.

§ *Fœdera*, pp. 212, 213.

|| "But that the world might not suspect King Henry lived still, and thereupon lean to new designs, he was no sooner dead, but with show of funeral rites, his body was brought into St. Paul's church, where, upon Ascension day, his face uncovered, he was exposed to the curiosity of every eye. For the king was resolved rather to endure the scandal of his murder, than to hazard the question of his life, which continually gave life to new seditions."—*Habington's Edward IV.*, p. 104.

The above recital, in all its minuteness, is confirmed by the three cotemporary chroniclers; and Fleetwood strengthens the surmise of the king's co-operation in the murder by expressly stating that his funeral obsequies were solemnized under the direction and by the express command of Edward IV.—*Fleetwood*, p. 38.

of the unhallowed deed propagated at the time by cotemporary writers, or upon any substantial basis on which to fix the accusation, beyond this simple fact, that he, in common with "many other" were then at the Tower: but this fact, as justly observed by Mr. Courtenay, "affords no proof of the murder."^{*}

Rous, the earliest historian that propagates the rumour of the crime being attributed to the Duke of Gloucester, writes evidently in entire ignorance of the circumstance. "He killed by others," he states, "or, as many believe, with his own hand, that most sacred man King Henry VI."[†] But it should be remembered that Rous wrote his work for a Lancastrian prince, the very monarch who vanquished Richard III., and who sought to canonize the king whom Gloucester's enemies had accused him of murdering. Fabyan speaks less vaguely of the popular report: but let it not be forgotten that his chronicle was not published until upwards of thirty years after the events in question, and most probably was not even compiled until prejudice had long held the ascendant, so far as relates to the circumstance under consideration. Yet even Fabyan, who was termed the "city chronicler," from his intimate acquaintance with matters occurring in London, where he lived and held office under Henry VII.,—even he, the father of the Tudor chroniclers, goes no farther than to say, "that of the death of the prince (Henry VI.) divers tales were told, but the most common fame went that he was stikked with a dagger by the hands of Richard of Gloucester."[‡] "Common fame," as even the most unreflecting must admit, is no evidence of guilt: yet a bad name, once acquired, is an apology for every imputation; and there can be no doubt but that Richard's alleged agency in this odious transaction was laid to his charge, both by Fabyan and later writers, more in consequence of the impression which they had received of him after death had closed his brief career, than from any authenticated deed that could tarnish the honour or detract from the nobleness of the youthful career of Richard, Duke of Gloucester.

Polydore Virgil, who is the next historian in chronological order to Fabyan, only certifies, when repeating the tale, that "the common report" implicated the Duke of Gloucester. Philip de Comines adds but little to confirm this in prefacing the same report by the words, "if what was told me be true:" and the MS. London Chronicle, preserved in the Cotton. MSS., expressly adds, that "how he was dead, nobody knew."[§]

In all these quotations no one single allegation is brought home to the young prince beyond that of mere suspicion; and even this, unsatisfactory as it is, implies merely that suspicion rested on him, rather from his known fidelity to his brother and attachment to his cause, than from any alleged malignity of purpose either covertly or openly pursued by Richard towards the rival of the line of York.|| The probable truth seems to have been given by Habington in his before-mentioned history of King Edward (whence an extract has recently been given), who sums up his narrative by saying that "the death of King Henry was acted in the dark, so that it cannot be affirmed

^{*} Courtenay's Commentaries, vol. ii. p. 54.

[†] Hist. Reg. Ang., p. 215.

[§] Cotton. MSS., Vitell A. xvi. fol. 133.

^{||} "Poor King Henry VI.," observes Holinshed, (who copied Hall, the follower of Polydore Virgil, and was the authority selected by Shakspeare for his historical plays.) "a little before deprived (as we have heard) of his realm and imperial crown, was now in the Tower, despoiled of his life by Richard, Duke of Gloucester, (as the constant fame ran) who to the intent that his brother Edward might reign in more surety, murdered the King Henry with a dagger."—*Holing. Chron.*, p. 324.

[‡] Fabyan, p. 662.

who was the executioner; only it is probable it was a resolution of the state;* the care of the king's safety and the public quiet in some sort making it, however cruel, yet necessary." This view is farther confirmed by two very early MSS.† quoted by the editor of Warkworth's Chronicle;‡ and is also adopted, to a certain degree, at least, by all historians whose works are based, not on hearsay or traditional evidence, but upon a full and impartial examination of original documents. It is from reasonings such as these that the truth can alone be elicited. Difference of opinion has existed from the time when doubts were first hazarded by Sir George Buck to that in which they were so ingeniously followed up by Lord Orford;§ and from the remote and turbulent period in which Richard III. flourished, many points of his history must still rest upon reasoning and conjecture alone. Not a few particulars, however, which in the time of Buck and Walpole were matters of mere speculation, have since been distinctly verified; and in spite of the opposition of Kennet to Buck, and of that of Hume to Lord Orford, together with the host of adversaries who violently opposed the views of this last most strenuous defender of King Richard, several very startling opinions, advanced both by Buck and Horace Walpole, have since been substantiated by examination of the public records|| of those times; and from annalists whose manuscript diaries were wholly unknown to the above-mentioned writers, and have only very recently been published. These latter works, considering that the greater proportion were not designed for the public eye, and that they have remained in MS. until within the last few years, are far truer guides than those chroniclers¶ who made their elaborate narratives the vehicle of their own prejudices rather than the means of perpetuating the truth.

Let every cotemporary writer be investigated, as also the source examined whence later historians have drawn their conclusions, and it must be apparent that no proof, presumptive or circumstantial, can be adduced to fix the murder of Henry VI., or that of his young and gallant heir, on the Duke of

* Life of Edw. IV., p. 104.

† Sloane MSS., 3479, fol. 6; Arundel MSS., 325, fol. 28.

‡ See Introduction, note to p. xvii.

§ In perusing Walpole's "Historic Doubts," it is indispensable to take into consideration the prejudice and preconceived opinions with which he had to combat. The conviction of this, as he himself says in the supplement to his work, was the cause of his bestowing the appellation "Historic Doubts" on his first Essay; hoping that some able writer would take up the subject, so as to prevent the reign of Richard III. from disgracing our annals, by an intrusion of childish improbabilities that place that reign on a level with the story of "Jack the Giant-killer." Buck was the first historian who wrote in defence of Richard; he was hence called a lover of paradoxes, and certainly he injured his cause by seeking to palliate the monarch's imputed crimes by parallel instances. But Sir George Buck agrees with Philip de Comines, and with the rolls of Parliament; and the research which has of late years been made into our ancient records, state papers and parliamentary history, places Buck's history in a far more credible light than would have been allowed to it some years since, and fixes both him and Lord Orford as higher authority than those historians who wrote professedly to please the Tudor dynasty.—See *Walpole's Supplement to his Historic Doubts*, pp. 185, 194; also his Reply to Hume, to Dr. Masters, and to the learned Dean Mills, published in Lord Orford's works, vol. ii. p. 215.

|| See Appendix Z.

¶ Mr. Bruce, in his Introduction to Fleetwood's Chronicle, (p. v.,) after stating that the original MS. was adopted by Edward IV. as an accurate relation of his achievements, adds, "All the other narratives either emanated from partisans of the adverse faction, or were written after the subsequent triumph of the House of Lancaster; when it would not have been prudent, perhaps not safe, to publish any thing which tended to relieve the Yorkists from the weight of popular odium which attached to the real or supposed crimes of their leaders."

Gloucester. The co-existent diaries, indeed, will all prove that George of Clarence was treacherous to his kindred, false to his colleagues, faithless in principle and in action. To him, however, individually, the crimes under discussion have never been imputed, scarcely, indeed, associated with his name; and why? because his evil deeds were visited by an early and violent death, and by such death he obtained pity and compassion. Richard of Gloucester, on the contrary, faithful in conduct, firm in allegiance, consistent, upright, honourable, is selected as the victim to bear each and every crime that resulted from the unnatural dissensions, the unrestrained ambition, or the restless jealousy of his elder brothers: and, were it not that among the many brief and transient notices of this troubled period some few recently discovered documents act as beacons to illuminate the almost impenetrable obscurity in which their lives are involved, the last monarch of the Plantagenet race might have remained a monument equally of moral turpitude as of unnatural personal deformity. Fortunately, however, for this much-maligned prince, the honour of our national representatives is concerned in the refutation of both charges; for it can scarcely be supposed that the aristocracy of England, that her proud barons and her lordly peers, could have conveyed the thanks of the Houses of Parliament to a perjured prince, a convicted regicide, an avowed murderer—one who, although a minor in age, had been singularly exposed to temptation owing to his youth and his perilous position, but who, in spite of the errors to be expected from the inexperience of a prince of eighteen, had sufficiently distinguished himself to merit honourable notice from the king and also from the highest authorities of the state. For it appears that after Edward IV. was finally re-established on the throne, only eleven weeks from his landing as an attainted fugitive, Richard, Duke of Gloucester, in presence of “his most royal majesty, having before him his lords spiritual and temporal,” received the thanks of the House of Commons, through their speaker, William Allington,* for his “knightly demeaning,” and for his “constant faith,” with divers other nobles and yeomen being with the king beyond the sea.†

The opinion entertained by his sovereign of his disinterested conduct will be most effectually portrayed in the words of the letters patent‡ yet extant that publicly recorded these his sentiments: “The king, especially considering the gratuitous, laudable and honourable services in many wise rendered to him by his most dear brother, Richard, Duke of Gloucester, his propinquity in blood, his innate probity and other deserts of manners and virtues, and willing, therefore, to provide him a competent reward and remuneration, to the end that he might the better maintain his rank and the burthens incum-

* Journal of the Lord of Grantham. See *Archæologia* for 1836.

† It is true that the Duke of Clarence was included in the thanks voted for the “knightly demeaning of the king’s brethren;” but it must not be forgotten that Clarence, by his timely defalcation, was chiefly instrumental in securing the restoration of King Edward to the throne. In addition to which, the innate jealousy of disposition which formed so leading a feature in George of Clarence would have rendered it an impolitic measure for the conduct of Richard of Gloucester to have been publicly opposed to his own, in face of the nobles and commonalty of his own country, and also of a distinguished foreigner, purposely present by invitation to be invested with regal marks of gratitude and esteem. Clarence was thanked for his “knightly demeaning;” those present knew such thanks had reference to his conduct at Barnet and Tewkesbury; but the assembled peers, the Seigneur de la Greythuse, the king, the queen, nay, the realm at large, could well distinguish between the tardy allegiance rendered by the capricious Clarence, and the “constant faith,” unselfish affection, and disinterested zeal shown by Richard of Gloucester, “with other nobles and yeomen being beyond sea” with the king.

‡ By patent 4th December, 11 Edw. IV., 1471.

bent thereupon, granted to him the forfeited estates of Sir Thomas Dymoke, Sir Thomas de la Laund, John Truthall and John Davy, all of whom had been convicted of treason.”* In further reward he was created lord high chamberlain of England for life, void upon the decease of the Earl of Warwick at Barnet, and invested with the manors of Middleham, Sheriff-Hutton, Penrith, and various lordships belonging to the House of Neville,† or appertaining to the estates of other nobles who were slain, or had been attainted after the battle of Barnet, or in the final contest at Tewkesbury; both which important victories the young prince had been greatly instrumental in achieving by his military skill and cool judgment, as well as by his determined bravery.

* Cottonian MSS., Julius B. xii. fol. 111.

† By patent, in July, 11 Edw. IV., 1471.