

Though dating its origin from the Norman conquest, it had been from time to time enlarged and beautified by the powerful and magnificent Earls of Lancaster,* in those palmy days of feudal splendour, when each lordly chief played the part of sovereign in his extensive demesnes, and each proud baron was, in truth, a petty prince in his innumerable lordships and estates.

In this celebrated fortress, then—scarcely more remarkable for its imposing appearance, its strength and baronial splendour, than for the dark and terrible deeds inseparably interwoven with its name†—Gloucester and his gentle consort, the Lady Anne, appear, as far at least as can be gathered from the brief historical and local records of the period, to have enjoyed a peaceful termination to their recent persecutions;‡ and here, in the spring-time of their lives, and in the fulness of their happiness, they sought, and for a brief interval enjoyed, that rest and tranquillity which Richard had fully earned by his fidelity and zeal, and which Warwick's daughter must have been well contented to find, after her sad reverses, and the calamitous scenes in which she had lately been called upon to participate.

stewardship of England, upon Edmond, Earl of Lancaster, his second son, on the attainder of Simon Montfort, Earl of Leicester, slain at the battle of Evesham, in the year 1264. Thomas, Earl of Lancaster, his heir, beheaded at Pontefract in 1322, bore upon his seal the superscription:—"Sigillum Thome Comitum Lancastrie et Leicestrie, Senescalli Anglie." The same high office was enjoyed successively by the Earl and Dukes of Lancaster (for so were they created 25 Edward III.) until the county palatine of Lancaster, with all the lands and honours belonging to the duchy of Lancaster, was carried to the crown in the person of Henry IV.; during whose reign, however, as well as under all the monarchs of that race, it still continued to be governed as a separate estate by its proper officers. On the accession of the House of York, King Edward IV. dissolved the former government; but although he appropriated the revenue exclusively to the crown, yet under certain modifications he sanctioned both the privileges and appointments which rendered it an estate apart from ordinary jurisdiction. The superintendence of these offices and powers were those that were now entrusted to Richard, Duke of Gloucester.

* Pomfret Castle was the ancestral abode of the Earls of Lancaster, who shine so conspicuously in the early annals of English history. In the reign of Edward II. this splendid fortress became the property of the crown, on the attainder and execution of Thomas, Earl of Lancaster, after the celebrated battle of Burrough-Brigg, 15 Edward II. It was, however, restored to his heir by that ill-fated monarch, and continued to be occupied by his descendants until conveyed to the crown, with the rest of the duchy of Lancaster, by Henry IV., the founder of that royal line. The above-named Thomas, as stated in a note at an earlier period of these memoirs, was the first peer of England who was executed on the scaffold. King Edward himself sat in judgment upon this princely noble, who was sentenced to be "hanged, drawn and quartered; but in regard of his regal blood, the extreme rigour of his doom was softened," and he was publicly beheaded, "before his own castle," of Pomfret, in the year 1322.—*Sandford*, book iii. p. 148.

† The miserable fate of the unhappy Richard II., said to have been murdered at Pomfret Castle, 1399, where, says the old chronicler, (*Walsingham*, p. 363.) "he was served with costly meats, but not suffered to eat, and dyed of forced famine in the 34th year of his age," is too well known to need recapitulation.

‡ The Duke of Gloucester evinced his attachment to Pontefract in after years, by granting to the town the charter of incorporation immediately after his elevation to the throne.—*Rous*, p. 215.

CHAPTER VIII.

The character of Richard, Duke of Gloucester, considered with reference to Shakspeare's tragedy of Richard III.—Gloucester's career, as dramatically represented, contrasted with historical records.—Shakspeare misled by the corrupt authorities of his age.—The fables of the early chroniclers furnished him with his descriptions.—The greater part of the charges brought against Richard of Gloucester by the dramatist disproved by the actual career of that prince, as verified by cotemporary documents.

THE marriage of Richard, Duke of Gloucester, with the affianced bride of Prince Edward of Lancaster appears the most appropriate time that could be selected for contrasting their relative positions; as also for considering the character of the duke, as it is ordinarily received through the works of the immortal Shakspeare, with that of the less attractive but less erring evidence of historical records.

With great justice has it been observed by the learned author of the History of Durham*—a county in which, from his long residence, the Duke of Gloucester was judged by his own actions, rather than by the perverted statements of later times—that the "magic powers of Shakspeare have struck more terror to the soul of Richard than fifty Mores or Bacons armed in proof."†

No individual who has bestowed attention on the subject can doubt the accuracy of this assertion; for the human mind is so constituted that pictorial representations, whether conveyed through the medium of the pen or the pencil, remain indelibly impressed on the imagination, to the utter exclusion of graver details, if chronology and antiquarian lore are essential to test their validity, and to displace the more pleasing impressions which have been received in childhood through the medium of dramatic scenes.

A few years since, it would have been thought little less than sacrilegious to impugn the statements of England's mighty dramatist, although truth itself had presided at the inquiry. Even now, when the spirit of research has so weakened the influence of mere tradition as to afford encouragement to the humblest votary of historical studies to seek and elucidate facts, whatever may be the consequences of their publication, yet is the lofty position of the Bard of Avon so inseparably interwoven with national pride and national affection, that the necessity of making apparent how much his masterly pen was misled by corrupt authorities is a task from which a daring hand might shrink, and the delicacy and difficulty of which cannot but be felt by the author of these memoirs.

The hardihood of the undertaking, however, has been considerably lessened by the researches of those able commentators who have lately bestowed attention and labour upon the subject; while it should also be borne in mind that the beauty and power of Shakspeare's dramas are wholly independent of the perverted statements of which he availed himself in their composition.

* Surtees's Hist. of Durham, p. ix.

† Sir Thomas More and Francis Bacon, Lord Verulam, wrote the history of the reigns of Richard III. and of his successor, Henry VII.

"The youth of England," observes a late lamented writer, "have been said to take their religion from Milton, and their history from Shakspeare;"* and he illustrates the latter remark by the authority of Coleridge, who instanced the great Duke of Marlborough,† Lord Chatham, and Southey,‡ the poet laureate; all of whom, he says, have acknowledged that their principal acquaintance with English history was derived in boyhood from Shakspeare's historical dramas.

Surely, then, if the important historical discoveries of late years have made apparent in several of these plays, inaccuracies and errors so striking, that, embracing as they do some of the leading events of our national annals, they can no longer escape observation, it behoves every admirer of Shakspeare, every individual who can appreciate the incomparable genius of the glory of the English drama, to add their feeble efforts towards clearing him from that imputation of chronological and historical error which really belongs only to the productions of those authors on whose testimony he rested his fame as an historical dramatic writer.

Independent of the justice of this measure towards one who has perpetuated some of the most glorious epochs in British history, it is, moreover, due to the bard as a debt of gratitude; for, by his unrivaled powers, he has given life to scenes, and importance to events, which otherwise, from their distant occurrence, would scarcely have been noticed in historical detail.

If Shakspeare has been the chief means of promulgating the erroneous traditions of the Tudor chroniclers, he has also been the leading instrument of making those errors known, by inducing a taste for historical knowledge, and creating such a lively interest for the periods which he so glowingly describes, that the intelligent mind seeks to perpetuate the pleasure derived from his writings by more minutely examining the sources from which he derived his graphic and affecting scenes. No one can peruse the works of Shakspeare without feeling the dignity and beauty of his productions; no one imbued with judgment to discern and taste to appreciate the bright inspirations of his genius, can fail of being an enthusiastic admirer both of the poet and the man. In all that relates to powerful imagery, to keen conception of human character and deep knowledge of the workings of the human heart, the Bard of Avon reigns triumphant: in all that relates to the embodying, as it were, of virtue and vice, of fear, of love, of ambition, of hatred and revenge, every strong passion, in a word, that wars with frail mortality, the inimitable Shakspeare stands alone and unrivaled.

But the time has passed away when the dramatist would be sought as historic authority also;§ and this not arising, it is scarcely necessary to say, from any defect in his composition, or weakness in delineating the events which he borrows from other writers, for in all such passages he improves and refines on the descriptions which he thought it fit to adopt, but because the periods of history from which the subjects selected by Shakspeare for his historical plays were taken, "are such as at the best can be depended on only for some principal facts, and not for the minute detail by which characters are unraveled;||" some being too distant to be particular; others, "that of Richard for example, too full of discord and animosity to be true;"¶ whilst

* See Commentaries on the Historical Plays of Shakspeare, by the Rt. Hon. Peregrine Courtenay. Preface, p. iv.

† Coleridge's Literary Remains, vol. ii. p. 166.

‡ Southey's Works, vol. i. p. viii.

§ "In the reign of King James I. the middling classes were familiarly acquainted with Shakspeare's plays, and referred to them for English history."—Coleridge, quoted by Courtenay.

|| Whately on Shakspeare, p. 28.

¶ Ibid.

throughout the whole series, supernatural causes are so intermingled, in accordance with the license of the poetry and the belief of the age, that although these fables add, and were intended to add, force to dramatic effect, they can no longer pass current for history.

The fabulous traditions transmitted by the early chroniclers are now well understood as such; and although historical writing lost much of its poetical character where fiction was separated from fact, and the charm of legendary lore discarded to make room for simple but well-authenticated truths, yet such truths are far more desirable in the narration of national events than the imagery of the poet or the embellishments of the dramatist.

In the tragedy about to be considered, the facts will best speak for themselves disrobed of their attractive dramatic garb, but not divested of their touching scenes, and such romantic incidents as can be well substantiated; the union of which, with the more harrowing details of darker ages, gives so peculiar a charm to our early national history.

The actual career of Richard of Gloucester has been so perverted, to suit ulterior views, that but for the aid of chronology, the handmaiden of history, it would almost baffle the most diligent to unravel the mystery which has concealed the truth for upwards of three centuries: but we "may contemplate great characters," says Sir Egerton Brydges, "with the lights we have, till we can form them into new portraits. The outlines must be the same; but the tints, colourings and aspects may be new." Such is the case with the subject under consideration; and although the new portrait of Richard of Gloucester must necessarily be at variance with that produced by the keenest delineator of human character that has, perhaps, ever appeared, yet justice requires that this prince should be contemplated in connection with the later information which modern research has rendered available. The outline of his portrait may remain the same, but the altered colouring and tints produce an aspect so different, that the picture becomes, as it were, new, when contrasted with the extravagant misrepresentation that has, for years, been palmed upon the world.

With the exception of a brief introduction, which will be presently noticed, Shakspeare commences his tragedy of Richard III. with the representation of the Lady Anne accompanying, as chief mourner, the corpse of King Henry VI. to Chertsey Abbey for interment, followed by her meeting, apparently accidentally, the Duke of Gloucester on the road; when, after much angry recrimination, founded on his alleged murder of the unhappy monarch and his princely son, he succeeds in winning for his bride the reputed relict of Prince Edward of Lancaster. Avoiding a renewal of the arguments which have been already fully discussed, when historically considering Richard's imputed share in the murder of those royal personages, it is apparent, from facts now fully substantiated,* that this prince and Warwick's daughter could not, under any circumstances, have met at King Henry's funeral; for the corpse of the unhappy monarch was taken to its final resting-place by water, and buried at midnight. "In a barge solemnly prepared with torches," says the chronicler of Croyland,† "the body of King Henry was conveyed, by water, to Chertsey, there to be buried." With foreign mercenaries to guard the sacred deposit, the corpse was removed, without interruption, from St. Paul's to its place of interment, and there, with all possible respect,‡ and with the customary solemnities of the age, it was "buried in our Ladye Chapelle at the Abbey."

* Pell. Records, p. 495.

† Cont. Croy., p. 556.

‡ The expenses attendant on the funeral of King Henry VI. have been preserved in the "Issue Rolls of the Exchequer," and completely refute the erroneous statements

Neither could the cousins, by any possibility, have met until very long after the funeral of the unfortunate Henry; for the Duke of Gloucester was in Kent with his royal brother at the time of this king's interment, and the Lady Anne was taken prisoner with Queen Margaret a few days after the battle of Tewkesbury (4th May), and remained either in state custody or in the charge of Clarence, by reason of her attainder, until she was discovered in the disguise of a kitchen-maid during the Michaelmas term following.

Equally, too, has the hideous and deformed appearance ascribed to Gloucester (with which the tragedy commences) been shown to have resulted from subsequent political malice; and although it is quite true that this prince sought Warwick's daughter in marriage after the House of Lancaster became extinct, yet the alliance was effected by open appeal to his sovereign and his brother, and not secured, as dramatically represented, either by stratagem, by violence, or the result of that demoniacal fascination—

"And I no friends to back my suit withal,
But the plain devil, and dissembling looks,"*—

which furnished the bard with so powerful a subject for his keen and masterly delineation. The extreme loveliness of the Lady Anne which Shakspeare commemorates, and which afforded him so effective a contrast to her misshapen lover, appears to be founded on fact: but instead of that beauty being unexpectedly forced upon Gloucester's observation, in the interesting and touching garb of youthful widowhood, and heightened, too, by outraged feelings, his very words—

"Your beauty, which did haunt me in my sleep,
To undertake the death of all the world,
So I might live an hour in your sweet bosom,"†—

confirm rather than invalidate the inference already deduced from historical documents, that Gloucester's attachment for his young kinswoman originated in early years, and had never been banished from his remembrance.

"Those eyes of thine from mine have drawn salt tears,"

even establish, to a certain degree, the testimony of those chroniclers who, in making Richard present at Prince Edward's death, assert that he drew not his sword from "respect to the prince's wife,"‡ to whom Richard "was affectionately, though secretly, attached."§ And when at length, by the decease of Edward of Lancaster, he was enabled to make known to the Lady Anne his long-cherished attachment, how widely different is the poet's startling account of the manner in which he secured the object of his love from the actual fact of the case, as given in the clear and simple narrative of the cotemporary historian already detailed; and which led Richard, in the height of his prosperity, to seek out, in her misery, his persecuted cousin, and, before applying to the king for sanction to their union, to place her in an asylum too hallowed to be violated even by a character so fiend-like as that which Richard, Duke of Gloucester, is made to glory in possessing.

"I, that am curtail'd of this fair proportion,
Cheated of feature by dissembling nature,

of Hall, Grafton, and Holinshed, that no decent respect was paid to the mortal remains of this unhappy and afflicted monarch. These, together with many interesting particulars connected with his interment, may be found inserted at length in *Bayley's History of the Tower*, vol. ii. p. 333.

* Richard III., Act I. Scene II.
‡ Buck, lib. iii. p. 81.

† Act I. Scene II.
§ Ibid.

Deform'd, unfinish'd, sent before my time
Into this breathing world, scarce half made up,
And that so lamely and unfashionable,
That dogs bark at me as I halt by them;—
Why I, in this weak piping time of peace,
Have no delight to pass away the time,
Unless to spy my shadow in the sun,
And descant on mine own deformity;
And therefore, since I cannot prove a lover,
To entertain these fair, well-spoken days,
I am determined to prove a villain,
And hate the idle pleasures of these days."*

Shakspeare, says another of that poet's able commentators,† makes great use of the current stories of the times concerning the circumstances of Richard's birth, "to intimate that his actions proceeded not from the occasion, but from a savageness of nature." The dramatist makes him to rejoice that the signs given at his birth were verified in his actions, and he makes him also to revel and luxuriate in crime, from its proving his innate propensity to evil, because, as observes the above-quoted commentator, "the deformity of his body was supposed to indicate a similar depravity of mind."‡ The historian, discarding all tradition connected with supernatural appearances, finds no foundation for so hateful a picture; but, on the contrary, invalidates the fables which have been so long promulgated, by producing the records of Gloucester's inflexible probity, of various rewards bestowed upon him for his fidelity, undeniable proofs of his firm attachment to his brother, and other testimonies of his gallant and noble deeds. His allegiance to his sovereign, and his peaceful demeanour to the queen consort and her family, are equally well attested; nor is there a single document, diary or cotemporary narrative, to warrant the accusations which have been poetically fixed on Richard, Duke of Gloucester, of hypocrisy to his youthful bride, execration of his venerable parent and fiend-like hatred and detestation of his brothers and his kindred.

To examine, separately, every unfair charge brought against Richard III. would exceed the limits that can be devoted to the present inquiry; but it is essential to notice the imputation that pervades the drama of Shakspeare, relative to his cruel and contemptuous treatment of King Edward's queen and connections.

"My Lord of Gloster, I have too long borne
Your blunt upbraidings, and your bitter scoffs:
By Heaven, I will acquaint his majesty
Of those gross taunts I often have endured.
I had rather be a country servant maid,
Than a great queen, with this condition,
To be so baited, scorn'd and storm'd at."§

If the smallest importance is to be attached to the authorities adduced in these memoirs, as connected with the earlier days of this prince's career, it must be apparent, that although the Duke of Clarence, immediately after the marriage of King Edward, absented himself from court, and openly gave vent to the most violent and rebellious feelings—feelings, indeed, so vindictive, that they eventually led to his inhumanly ordering search to be made for the queen's father and brother in their retreat in the Forest of Dean,|| to

* Richard III., Act I. Sc. I.

† Ibid., p. 36.

‡ Whately on Shakspeare, p. 35.
§ Richard III., Act I. Scene III.
|| "And at that tyme was the Lord Ryvers taken, and one of his sons, in the Forest of Dean, and brought to Northampton; and the Earl of Pembroke, and Sir Richard Herbert, his brother, were beheaded all at Northampton, all four; by the commandment of the Duke of Clarence and the Earl of Warwick."—*Warkworth's Chron.*, p. 7.

his commanding their execution without trial, and to his forthwith depriving the king and his royal consort of their regal honours and their crown; yet it is not only recorded of Richard, that he was most peaceable and well-conducted towards the queen and her kindred, but that her only surviving brother, the Lord Rivers, was associated in all the confidence of friendship with the monarch and himself during their exile; and that Gloucester and that nobleman mutually co-operated in re-establishing King Edward on the throne, and in releasing the queen and her infant offspring from sanctuary.* His unanimity with his royal brother has been attested by various documents, and the imprisonment of the Duke of Clarence, which Shakspeare makes to precede Richard's union with the Lady Anne, not only occurred some years subsequent to it, but could not, by any possibility, have been even contemplated at the time; for Gloucester had not only, a few months previously to that event, been the chief agent in reconciling the rebellious and ungrateful Clarence to his offended sovereign, but the avaricious opposition of this prince to Richard's proposed marriage with his cousin was the origin of those angry feelings which rankled in Clarence's heart until his death, but which appear not to have dwelt beyond the dispute in question, either upon King Edward's mind, or that of his younger and more generous brother.

This is apparent from the fact, that the same year in which the union of Richard with the Lady Anne was solemnized, Clarence was invested, as the husband of the eldest sister, with the title and dignities appertaining to his deceased father-in-law, the "Earl of Warwick,"† the heirship of which formed that source of contention which has been already detailed; and the royal favour which conferred on the faithful Gloucester the stewardship of England in the north, and restored to him his recently forfeited dignity of high constable of the realm, was, with self-denying impartiality on the part of the king, extended also to the perfidious Clarence, who was nominated to the high appointment of lord chamberlain of England for life, which had been voluntarily relinquished by Gloucester,‡ on his fixing his abode in the northern parts of the kingdom.

Again: the desolate, broken-hearted Margaret of Anjou, who is made by Shakspeare§ to wander unrestrained through palaces tenanted by her rival, Elizabeth Wydville, and to indulge in language little reconcilable either with her subdued spirit or the portly and polished demeanour attributed to King Rene's accomplished daughter by her contemporaries,|| was, at the same period, closely incarcerated in the Tower, where she was imprisoned from the day preceding her husband's death until she was removed in custody, first to Windsor, and thence to Wallingford. She was afterwards ransomed, at the

* See Fleetwood's Chron., pp. 2, 3, 11.

† "In the 12th Edw. IV. (in consideration of that his marriage with Isabel, the eldest daughter and co-heiress to the before-mentioned Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick and Salisbury) he was, by special letters patent, (*Rot. Pat.*, p. 4614, art. 70.) dated the 25th March, created 'Earl of Warwick and Salisbury;' and about two months after, viz., the 20th May, 1472, upon the surrender of his brother, Richard, Duke of Gloucester, he had the office of great chamberlain of England granted unto him for term of life; which high office had appertained to Richard, Earl of Warwick, before his decease at Barnet."—*Sandford*, book v. p. 412.

‡ By patent 20th May, 12th Edw. IV.,—stating that the king had, on the 18th May in the preceding year, granted to his brother, Richard, Duke of Gloucester, the office of great chamberlain of England for life; that he had resigned the office, and that his majesty had conferred the same on the Duke of Clarence.—*Add. MSS. by Rymer for the Reign of Edw. IV.*, No. 4614, art. 70.

§ Richard III., Act. I. Sc. III.

|| Harl. MSS., No. 542.

expiration of five years, by her father and the French king,* into whose dominions she was conveyed, with little respect and no regal state; and where, bereft of all domestic ties, and with a heart seared by trials and withered by afflictions, the heroic Margaret of Lancaster ended her most calamitous career.

Many other scenes in this tragedy might be as strongly contrasted with cotemporary documents, did the necessity of such a measure justify so long a digression. A few leading points, however, are alone sufficient to establish the object proposed—that of placing in juxtaposition the character and career of Richard, Duke of Gloucester, as perpetuated by Shakspeare, and such as it is proved to have been from authentic historical records. Before seeking for the causes that induced such discrepancy of detail and led to such conflicting statements, it is necessary, towards forming a right judgment on the subject, to consider further the imputations that are connected by Shakspeare with Richard's early childhood, as well as such calumnies as are heaped upon him in maturer years,—if, indeed, such a term is applicable at nineteen, his age at the period when the drama that bears his name commences. Few persons, however, on perusing its opening scenes, would imagine that the two characters there introduced to their notice were young persons in the spring time of life: a misshapen monster, if not hoary in age, at least advanced in years, and hardened in vice, is the association impressed by the description of Gloucester, instead of that of a youth distinguished by his gallantry, his prowess and his noble achievements; while the sentiments and conduct of the Lady Anne, little in accordance with her youthful age at seventeen, leave the impression of one well accustomed to the arts of flattery, and easily entrapped by the prospect of worldly advancement, in however unseemly a form it may be conveyed. This total disregard of the ages of the chief parties concerned, appears to be one leading cause of the erroneous views which have been so long entertained relative to Richard of Gloucester. It explains the discrepancies in date which occur in Shakspeare when he introduces this prince in other of his historical plays;† and reconciles also many seeming inconsistencies connected with acts laid to the charge of Richard of Gloucester, both in them and in the tragedy which is more particularly commemorative of his career. Thus, when a mere infant in arms, nay, even before he was born, he is by the dramatist made to take part in the feuds of the times, and also to display his callous and hardened nature. Such, for example, is the memorable scene that follows the execution of Jack Cade, in which Richard, bearding the veteran Clifford in that well-known passage,—

"Oft have I seen a hot o'erweening cur
Run back and bite, because he was withheld,"‡—

is thus rebuked by the warrior:—

"Hence, heap of wrath, foul indigested lump,
As crooked in thy manners as thy shape!"§

Now Iden, the sheriff of Kent, beheaded this rebel in July, 1450, just two years before Richard was born.|| At the first battle of St. Alban's, Gloucester is not only named as slaying the Duke of Somerset, but is again displayed in the odious light that renders his name so detestable.

"Sword, hold thy temper; heart, be wrathful still;
Priests pray for enemies, but princes kill."¶

* Paston Letters, vol. i. p. 89.

† Second and Third Parts of Henry VI.

‡ Second Part of Henry VI., Act V. Scene I.

§ W. Wyr., p. 470.

¶ Ibid.

¶ Act V. Scene II.

And although little more than two years old at this very battle, the Duke of Gloucester is in addition represented as thrice saving the life of the valiant Earl of Salisbury.

——— "My noble father,
Three times to-day I help him to his horse,
Three times bestrid him, thrice I led him off,
Persuaded him from any further act."*

At the battle of Wakefield, in the year 1460, when Richard was but eight years of age, and, as already mentioned, left under the charge of his mother, Cecily, Duchess of York, in London, he is said to have been present in Sendal Castle, and there to have precociously displayed that depravity and ambition which form the basis of the tragedy which has so contributed to blight this prince's fame:—

"An oath is of no moment"†—

Again—

——— "And father, do but think
How sweet a thing it is to wear a crown."‡

At the battle of Mortimer's Cross, and at that of Towten, both occurring after he had been sent by the Lady Cecily to Utrecht for safety, Richard is again represented, child as he then was, and far removed from the scene of action, as taking a leading part in the events of the day; singling out the boldest of their foes, and giving vent to those demoniacal sentiments which, throughout these tragedies, by inducing the execrations which so abound against the "foul-mouthed crook-back," accustom the mind to invest him with such revolting characteristics and personal deformities, as fully to justify the yet more odious picture he is eventually to exhibit in the character of King Richard III. Moreover, although he was a mere youth, of such tender years that he is only historically named as the object of his widowed parent's anxiety and of his royal brother's bounty, upon King Edward's accession to the crown, he is, notwithstanding, associated by the dramatist with the monarch from that period upon every occasion, and made to take part with him in every battle, as his equal in age, in experience, valour and judgment: though King Edward himself was but eighteen when he ascended the throne, and Richard an infant of eight years. It may also be observed, that there exists no document to prove his acting in any military capacity until ten years following that period; when the king was driven into exile, and Gloucester aided and fought to secure his brother's restoration.

These striking anomalies may be satisfactorily explained in two ways: partly, indeed, from the license permitted to the dramatist, as relates to time, action and embellishment of character;§ but they are chiefly to be attributed to the incorrect source whence Shakspeare derived his authority; on alone for his deformed portraiture both of Richard's mind and person, but also for most of the historical scenes connected with his career. That the poet succeeded in embodying to the life the leading features ascribed to Richard at the period when he wrote, and in making the crimes imputed to this prince seem the natural result of a temperament and form so hideous, is

* Ibid., Scene III.

† Third Part of Hen. VI., Act I. Scene II.

‡ Ibid.

§ The historical events recorded in Shakspeare's tragedy of Richard III. occupy a space of about fourteen years, but are frequently confused for the purposes of dramatic representation. The second scene of the first act commences with the funeral of King Henry VI., who is said to have been murdered on the 21st of May, 1471, while the imprisonment of Clarence, which is represented previously in the first scene, did not take place till 1477-8.—*Shakspeare*, Valpy edition.

evinced not only by the popularity that has ever attended the representation of this tragedy, but would seem also to be particularly illustrated by the fact of the bust of Richard III. being one out of three selected to embellish the monument of Shakspeare presented by Garrick to the poet's native town: thus indicating that, in the estimation of one of his most skilful and ardent admirers, a reference to this tragedy was considered one of the most appropriate emblems that could be chosen to perpetuate this poet's accurate display of the workings of the human heart.* As regards the source whence he gleaned materials that called forth so brilliant a display of his genius and transcendent dramatic powers, no doubt exists of the bard having selected as his chief authority, Holinshed, the latest and the most prejudiced of the Tudor historians: and that he is admitted so to have done is demonstrated in the painting of Shakspeare, preserved in the Town Hall of Stratford-upon-Avon; in which, occupying a prominent position in the ground before him, lie Holinshed's Chronicles, mingled with such ancient writers and legendary tales as the dramatist is known to have consulted in his other productions.

Here lies the explanation of those long-perpetuated fables, which the historian cannot but deeply lament, and which, usurping the place of facts, have transformed the narrative of the life of Richard, Duke of Gloucester, into a wild, unnatural romance, rather than embracing that intermixture of strength and weakness which, when truth alone furnishes the tale, will be found, on reference to our regal annals—with few exceptions at least—to sum up the career of crowned heads no less than of individuals in a humbler station of life. But history was not pursued in Shakspeare's time with the research and attention to chronological exactness which now characterize the study. The difficulty of procuring original documents, or of ascertaining if such records had been preserved, compelled the annalists of that early period to copy the works of preceding chroniclers, and thus perpetuate their erroneous statements, or even to increase the mischief of original inaccuracy by engraving on hearsay reports the embellishments of a wonder-loving age.

It was, indeed, the almost utter impossibility of testing such contradictory reports, and the evident dearth of proper materials for the compilation of historical works, that first led to the foundation of those valuable libraries, which, under the names of the Cottonian,† Harleian, Bodleian, and similar collections, have so deservedly commemorated their great founders,‡ and which, open as they now are to the public, afford such rich sources of reference to all persons desirous of seeking truth and of correcting the errors to which the annalists of such times were liable.

The earliest printed chronicles, relating to the period under consideration, were not published until after the accession of the Tudor dynasty, when it was the interest of the writers to secure popularity by aspersing the characters of Richard III., and perpetuating every report that could strengthen the cause of the reigning sovereign and justify the deposal and death of his rival. "It

* Amongst the memorials of Shakspeare at Stratford-upon-Avon, the place of his birth, is the full length figure of the bard, in a niche in front of the Town Hall; the pedestal supporting which is ornamented with three busts, viz., Henry V., Richard III., and Queen Elizabeth.

† Sir Robert Cotton, who was cotemporary with Shakspeare, both having flourished during the reign of Queen Elizabeth, had observed with regret that the history, laws and constitution of Britain were, in general, very inefficiently understood; and in an expensive and indefatigable labour of upwards of forty years, he accumulated those numerous and inestimable treasures which compose the Cottonian Library. These valuable records are deposited in the British Museum, and open to public inspection.—See *Preface to the Catalogue of the Harl. MSS.*, p. 2.

‡ See Appendix GG.

is to Polydore Virgil," observes an able writer of the present day,* "that we must look as the source whence the stream of succeeding historians chiefly borrowed their materials." This historian wrote his work by express command of King Henry VII., the successor and bitter enemy of Richard, Hall copied from him, but with his own additions, gleaned from the malignant reports of the times, which were then in full force; and Grafton and Holinshed copied Hall, giving as positive facts, however, much matter which Hall himself merely reported from hearsay or conjecture: and all these chroniclers, availing themselves largely of the graphic descriptions of Sir Thomas More, incorporated in their works his monstrous account of Richard, Duke of Gloucester, without seeking to invalidate the inconsistencies of More's narrative by reference to cotemporary writers or to early and unpublished authorities.

If, then, the best materials for compiling the historical records of this period could alone be gleaned from the most corrupt and prejudiced sources; and if Shakspeare selected as his guide the chronicler who had most fully incorporated every tradition, every surmise, and every marvellous or malicious report connected with the last of the Plantagenet monarchs,—and this from believing it to be the most standard and true authority, as well as the latest and most popular account—sufficient foundation will appear for the odious picture which has so long been received as the exact representation of this much calumniated prince. The Tudor historians themselves had either no means of access to cotemporary documents, or were altogether unacquainted with the Croyland chronicler, and with those other more concise narratives connected with Richard's time which were afterwards collected by John Stow, and are now deposited in the Harleian library. These records were altogether unavailable to the poet, even had he been disposed for the laborious toil which was then incident to historical research; for let it not be forgotten that when the Bard of Avon flourished, the two university libraries were almost the only repositories of books of erudition in the kingdom, and that these were but scantily supplied; the royal library, founded after the general dissolution of religious houses from manuscripts collected out of the spoils of the monasteries by the second monarch of the Tudor dynasty, being exclusively appropriated to the use of the royal family and their instructors.†

Shakspeare, however, did not profess to be an historian: his vocation was that of a dramatist; his compositions were written from the creative fervour of his genius; and, unrestrained by history, he took the hint of his characters from the current fables of the day, and "adapted their depositions so as to give to such fictions a show of probability."‡ In his capacity of actor, manager and poet, he had no time to seek out materials which were difficult of access; his object was emphatic recitation, distinction and preservation of character, and the production, through the medium of the outward senses, of such pictures as would rest on the mind.

Facts well substantiated and chronological exactness are indispensable to the historian. Not so to the dramatist: he is licensed to substitute the type for the reality, and is privileged to select only the most striking features in illustration of the scenes which he undertakes to portray. Like an historical painter, he must crowd into the small space allowed him the leading personages connected with that subject; and, although unfettered by the minute exactness which is required in more elaborate productions, he must grasp the entire outline of his design, and develop the plot through the

* See Sir Frederick Madden's documents relative to Perkin Warbeck, *Archæologia*, vol. xxvii. p. 153.

† Preface to the Catalogue of the Harl. MSS.

‡ Whately on Shakspeare, p. 20.

medium of the characters themselves, by making each individual support the part which he was supposed to have enacted when living. Thus it is apparent, that however pleasing the representation of an historical play, yet, as in the case of an historical romance, it can scarcely be considered the most effective or the surest mode of conveying historical instruction. Most unphilosophical, then, is it to form an estimate of the character of Richard of Gloucester from such a source; considering that the remarkable scenes connected with his checkered life not merely afforded the most fertile theme for the display of the poet's peculiar genius, but that, from the striking and varied points in his character as delineated by Shakspeare, in accordance with the belief of the times, this tragedy has been invariably selected to develop the highest efforts of the histrionic art; and by means of Garrick, Kemble, Cooke, Kean and other great tragedians, has acquired a degree of popularity, and been invested with a spirit and appearance of truth, far beyond many other of this great dramatist's inimitable productions.

The leading events contained in the tragedy of Richard III., more especially such as are connected with the depravity of his mind and the deformity of his person, are either closely copied from Holinshed, or from his authority on such points, Sir Thomas More; so literally, indeed, that many passages are merely changed from the quaint prose version of the chroniclers themselves to the melodious verse of Shakspeare. But as these passages chiefly relate to portions of the monarch's life not yet considered in these memoirs, it would be premature here to extract the examples that might be adduced in corroboration of this acknowledged fact. Sufficient, it is hoped, has been advanced to render it apparent that the prejudices entertained against Richard of Gloucester in Shakspeare's time led to his being charged by the dramatist in his earlier days with crimes in which, from his youthful age, he could, by no possibility, have participated; and those scenes in which he did take part, and which are considered to cast so dark a shade over his character, were rather incident to the period in which he lived than to any savage ferocity peculiar to himself. For example,* perjury then was common, and selfish ambition prevailed to an almost inconceivable degree; even bloodshed, also, was characteristic of the times,† which was made up of events in which treasonable plots, personal malice, bitter revenge, and unblushing perfidy were the principal features. From the time of the Norman conquest to the close of the Plantagenet race—that is to say, through the entire of what is ordinarily termed "the middle ages," political expediency was the prevailing incentive to action. It may be alleged, and perhaps justly, that in the present, as in the former age, expediency is often substituted as a rule of action for

* In confirmation of this it will be sufficient to direct attention to the perjury of Edward IV., not only at York, (*Warkworth's Chronicle*, p. 14,) but on two other memorable occasions: this unworthy act, conjoined to a spirit of revenge, having caused the murder of Lord Welles and Sir Thomas Dymock, before his expulsion from the throne, (see *Excerpta Historica*, p. 282,) and led to the execution of the Duke of Somerset and fourteen other Lancastrian leaders after his restoration, and in the face of his solemn pledge of safety at Tewkesbury.—*Warkworth's Chronicle*, p. 19. The perfidiousness of the Duke of Burgundy to the Count St. Pol, whom, under the mask of friendship, he inveigled into his power by promises of safe conduct, merely at the end of his journey to deliver him up to his enemy, Louis XI., for execution, is equally well known, (*Habington*, p. 179;) while the mercenary and selfish treachery displayed by the heads of so noble a family as the Talbots, who, in conjunction with Sir John Tempest, captured, by the aid of a renegade monk, their meek and afflicted monarch, Henry VI., solely for the reward, in which they conjointly shared, (*Warkworth's Chronicle*, p. 41,) will sufficiently portray the moral turpitude of the age, and depict the abject state of society in that corrupt and lawless period.

† See Stow's *Annals*, p. 422.

the immutable moral standard. Admitting this to be the fact, it must, nevertheless, be allowed, that although we may not actually be less immoral or less vicious, yet our manners are more refined, and our understandings are more enlightened. Shakspeare flourished at the dawn of this more enlightened period; and the career of Richard, Duke of Gloucester, whose death terminated the dark and corrupt era which ushered in so bright an order of things, was a theme too rich in variety of subject, too fertile in harrowing scenes, to be overlooked by the dramatist; the more so, as his royal mistress, who distinguished him with her favour and patronage,* rejoiced at the public debasement of a monarch whose ruin had elevated her grandsire to the crown,† and laid the foundation of that dynasty of which she was so bright an ornament.

“Never had poet a better right to use freely the license allowed to poets,” observes one of his learned commentators,‡ “or less necessity for drawing upon unpoetical stores for any portion of his fame;”§ yet he adds, “either he or his more ancient author has taken such liberties with facts and dates, and has omissions so important, as to make the pieces, however admirable as a drama, quite unsuitable as a medium of instruction to the English youth.” All farther investigation of this point, however, would greatly exceed the space that could be awarded to it in these memoirs. Suffice it to say, that the chronological errors of Shakspeare must be attributed to the dramatic spirit in which he wrote; and his misconception of events purely historical, to the difficulty of testing history with mere tradition, at the period when he produced his incomparable works. If the all-absorbing nature of his pursuits led Shakspeare, in some instances, to pursue it to the sacrifice alike of fact and justice, yet the insuperable obstacles that presented themselves, even to such as were willing and anxious to consult original authority, completely exonerates the bard from all imputation of intentionally misrepresenting persons or events; while it as fully exculpates the old chroniclers from wilful departure from truth, and also satisfactorily explains the cause of those contradictory, erroneous and perverted statements which influenced Shakspeare in his historical details.

In truth, misled as the poet was by bad authorities, but yet making a correct dramatic use of them, Shakspeare’s tragedy of Richard III., so long considered as a just representation of that prince’s mind, person and actions, ought rather to be viewed in the light of a masterly delineation of the all-absorbing passion of ambition, when pursued in defiance of duty, both moral and religious, and regardless alike of all restraint imposed by divine or human laws.

It is, however, it should be distinctly observed, the materials used by Shakspeare in his play, and not his management of the character of Richard

* Queen Elizabeth distinguished him with her favour; and her successor, King James, with his own hand, honoured the great dramatist with a letter of thanks for the compliment paid in Macbeth to the royal family of the Stuarts.—*Symmon’s Life of Shakspeare*, p. x.

† “It is evident from the conduct of Shakspeare,” says Lord Orford, in his philosophical inquiry connected with this point, “that the House of Tudor retained all their Lancastrian prejudices even in the reign of Queen Elizabeth. In his play of Richard III., the bard seems to deduce the woes of the House of York from the curses which Queen Margaret had vented against them; and he could not give that weight to her curses without supposing a right in her to utter them.”—*Hist. Doubts*, p. 114. Malone, also, in his comment upon this tragedy, says, “That the play was patronised by the queen on the throne, who probably was not a little pleased at seeing King Henry VII. placed in the only favourable light in which he could have been exhibited on the scene.”—*Courtenay’s Commentaries*, vol. ii. p. 116.

‡ *Courtenay’s Commentaries*, vol. i. p. 8.

§ *Ibid.*

III. derived from them, that have formed the subject of the present inquiry; and it must be apparent to all who will calmly consider the point, that an imposing representation, founded on the generally received story of this monarch, together with an eager desire to grasp the entire subject as a whole, was the main object of the bard, and not a close adherence to facts, or a chronological arrangement of such events as he considered fitting for scenic exhibition. He thought as a dramatist, and made mere matter of fact subservient to the powerful delineation of such characters as presented themselves to his comprehensive mind. He cast from him those bonds which would have fettered the antiquary and the historian; and many an admiring audience has thronged to revel on scenes which would have probably lived but for a brief period had they been less poetically, but more truly depicted. Nevertheless, however winning and fascinating the productions of Shakspeare may be, as transporting his readers to the times which his graphic description seems to revivify and people with living actors, it cannot fail to be lamented by the historian, and by all who desire that truth and not fiction should characterize the national archives of England, in the delineation of the lives and characters of British sovereigns, that Richard III., the last monarch of the chivalrous Plantagenets, should have been selected by their national bard as the individual on whom to exercise his fertile genius and to display his transcendent powers as a dramatist, since the incorrect authorities to which alone he had access, and by which he was consequently misled, were the cause of his depicting Richard of Gloucester unfaithfully, according to genuine historical record. The “Lancastrian partialities of Shakspeare,” Sir Walter Scott observes,* “and a certain knack at embodying them, have turned history upside down, or rather inside out.”

* *Rob Roy*, vol. i. p. 231.