

in Staffordshire, with the accustomed wages,"*—or Forest as "keeper of the Lady Cecily's wardrobe,"†—would have excited no more suspicion or even attention than that of the many other unimportant individuals whose names occur in King Richard's diary, if prejudice had not predisposed the mind to associate these entries with the reputed assassination of the princes. Indeed, the very office assigned to Forest would rather tend to exculpate than condemn him; for it can scarcely be imagined that Richard would place the murderer of her grandsons in a trustworthy situation in the mansion of his venerable parent; while the subsequent entry of a small annuity to Forest's widow‡ would favour the belief that he was an old and tried servant of the Duchess of York, rather than an hireling attached but a few months to her household. It has been farther argued that Green's culpability is implied by an entry in the Harl. MSS. granting him "a general pardon;"§ another example this of the false inferences which may be drawn by pronouncing judgment without due consideration being given to the usages of the era in which the entry was made.

The Federal|| abounds with instances of "a general pardon." In its pages will be found one granted to Dr. Rotheram, Archbishop of York, for all "murders, treasons, concealments, &c.;"¶ and this, after he had crowned King Richard in his northern capital, and long after he had been released from imprisonment and restored to his sovereign's favour. The Archbishop of Dublin, in the reign of King Henry VII., is, in like manner, "pardoned" for a catalogue of crimes** which is truly appalling: and many such pardons might be adduced as granted to the most exemplary persons. Indeed, the very diary which records Green's pardon contains corresponding entries to William Brandone, to Robert Clifford and to Sir James Blount, the governor of Hammes.†† Yet these brave men have neither been suspected nor in any way implicated in heinous offences or revolting crimes. Nor was there any basis for condemning Green on such evidence: similar entries were customary in the middle ages, at the commencement of a new reign; and but for the traditional notoriety attached to Green, arising from Sir Thomas More's narrative, his pardon and his appointments would have excited as little suspicion as would otherwise have been called forth by the very natural and ordinary gift to Brackenbury, as governor of the Tower, of "the keeping of the lions" in that fortress, or the "custody of the mint," established within its precincts.

Lengthened as has been this discussion, yet, as the truth of the tradition narrated by Sir Thomas More and Lord Bacon has been considered to have received confirmation from the discovery, in after years, of the supposed remains of the young princes, a brief notice of that occurrence is also indispensable.

"In the year 1674," states Sandford,‡‡ whose relation is given on the testimony of an eye-witness, one, he says, principally concerned in the scrutiny, "in order to the rebuilding of several offices in the Tower, and to clear the White Tower from all contiguous buildings, digging down the stairs which led from the king's lodgings to the chapel in the said tower, about ten feet in the ground were found the bones of two striplings in (as it seemed) a wooden chest, which, upon the survey, were found proportionable to the ages of those

* Harl. MSS., No. 433, fol. 55.

† Ibid., fol. 187.

‡ Ibid., fol. 28.

§ Ibid.

¶ Harl. MSS., No. 433, fol. 58. 83. 101.

†† Sandford, *Geneal. Hist.*, book v. p. 404.

‡ Ibid., fol. 78.

|| *Hist. Doubts*, p. 50.

** Ibid.

two brothers, (Edward V. and Richard, Duke of York,) about thirteen and eleven years; the skull of one being entire, the other broken, as were, indeed, many of the bones, as also the chest, by the violence of the labourers, who, not being sensible of what they had in hand, cast the rubbish and them away together; wherefore they were caused to sift the rubbish, and by that means preserved all the bones." . . . "Upon the presumption that these were the bones of the said princes, his majesty, King Charles II., was graciously pleased to command that the said bones should be put into a marble urn, and deposited among the relics of the royal family in the chapel of King Henry VII. in Westminster Abbey."

It may be doubted if any stronger instance could be adduced of the mischief that may result from a desire of reconciling historical traditions with coincidences which, chancing to agree with local legends, blind the enthusiastic and prejudging to all the many minor proofs that can alone substantiate the truth sought to be re-established. The discovery of these very bones, which for nearly two centuries has been considered to remove all doubt of Richard's guilt, is the silent instrument of clearing him from the imputation, if Sir Thomas More's statement, by which he has been condemned, is considered to be verified by their discovery. This historian, it will be remembered, relates that "about midnight" the young king and his brother were murdered; that after "long lying still to be thoroughly dead," their destroyers "laid their bodies naked out upon the bed, and fetched Sir James to see them; which, after the sight of them, caused these murderers to bury them at the stair-foot metely deep in the ground, under a great heap of stones."* No mention is made of a chest; they were laid out "naked upon the bed;" and the nights in July (the reputed period of the dark deed) afford small time after midnight for two men to commit such a crime, to watch long over their expiring victims, to lay them out for the inspection of their employer, and, by his command, to dig a space sufficiently large to bury a chest deep in the ground; although the bodies of two youths might be hastily cast into "a deep hole"† under the stairs, and some stones cast upon them.‡ Sandford states that the chest was found when "digging down the stairs, about ten feet deep."§ More asserts that the bodies were buried at the "stair-foot, metely deep in the ground."|| In addition to this, the discovery was made in the stairs which led from the king's lodgings to the chapel; now Sandford, in his previous narrative of the murder, distinctly asserts that "the lodgings of the princes being in the building near the water-gate, which is, therefore, to this day, called the Bloody Tower, their bodies were buried in the stair-foot there, somewhat deep in the ground."¶ Both these statements are at variance with Sir Thomas More, the first promulgator of the tradition, and the source whence all subsequent historians have derived their information. If the young princes died in the Bloody Tower, and were buried at the stair-foot there, then it could not be their remains which were discovered in the stairs leading to the chapel; and if they inhabited the king's lodgings, and were buried where the remains were discovered, it at once invalidates the assertion of More,** and of Lord Bacon†† likewise, that they were removed from "so vile a corner" by the king's command, who would have them buried in a better place because they were "a king's sons."

If reference is made to the early history of the Tower of London, it will be found that the portion of that fortress so long reputed to be the scene of

* More, p. 131.

† Bacon, p. 123.

‡ More, p. 131.

** More, p. 132.

† Buck, p. 84.

§ Sandford, p. 404.

¶ Sandford, p. 404.

†† Bacon, p. 123.

the young princes' tragical end, was, in their days, merely a porter's lodge,* and not likely to be, in the smallest degree, connected with the dark deed which its particular appellation is believed to have perpetuated. Nay, so far from the gateway being thus designated in consequence of the alleged murder within its narrow precincts, the very epithet itself, originating from other causes nearly a century after the disappearance of the princes, seems to be the sole origin of a rumour which gained strength in consequence of certain peculiarities in its structure appearing to coincide with Sir Thomas More's description.† Hence, towards the close of the Tudor dynasty, it began to be reported as the scene of the dark transaction; and surmise passing current with the multitude for fact, it has long since‡ been confidently pointed out as the actual site of the tragedy.§ "In the careful and minute survey which was taken of the Tower of London," observes its elaborate historian, "in the reign of Henry VIII., this building is called the Garden Tower, by reason of its contiguity to the constable's or lieutenant's garden, which now forms a part of what is termed the Parade."|| In the year 1597, another survey was made of the fortress by order of Queen Elizabeth, and it was then known by its present appellation; which it is generally supposed to have derived from the circumstance of the two young princes, Edward V. and his brother, Richard, Duke of York, having, as it is said, been put to death in this particular spot, by order of their uncle, the Duke of Gloucester, afterwards King Richard III. "The whole story of the two royal brothers," continues this writer, "having been destroyed in the Tower, comes to us in so questionable a shape, that it can never be entertained without some serious doubts." If we admit, however, that the young princes really came to a violent death in the Tower, the idea of this place having been the scene of their destruction rests on no authority; and the story which the warders, whose trade it is "to tell a wondrous tale," so gravely propagate respecting the discovery of these bones under the little staircase above alluded to (in the Bloody Tower), is still more glaringly false. Bones, it is true, were found in the Tower in the reign of Charles II., and they were looked upon to be those of children corresponding with the two princes; but it is most decidedly known that they were discovered in a very different part of the fortress to that in which tradition reports them to be interred, viz., on the south side of the White Tower, and at the foot of the staircase which leads to the chapel in that building.¶

* "This gateway was erected in the time of Edward IV. It is about thirty-four feet long and fifteen wide. Each end of the entrance was originally secured by gates and a strong portcullis, and on the eastern side, between these defences, was a small circular stone staircase, leading to the superstructure which formed the lodging or watch, and consisted of two gloomy apartments, one over the other, and a space for working the portcullis."—*Bayley's Hist. of the Tower*, vol. i. p. 262.

† "At the end, towards the south, both the gates and the portcullis still exist: they are extremely massive, and carry with them every appearance of high antiquity. The staircase leading to the porter's lodge, though not now made use of, also remains; but the gates, as well as the portcullis, which were at the northern end, have long since been removed."—*Bayley*, vol. i. p. 262.

‡ "All the domestic apartments of the ancient palace within the Tower were taken down during the reigns of James II. and William and Mary."—*Bayley's Londiniana*, vol. i. p. 109.

§ "It is a very general opinion that the building called the 'Bloody Tower' received its appellation from the circumstance of the royal children having been stifled in it, and it is commonly and confidently asserted that the bones were found under a staircase there; yet both of these stories seem wholly without foundation."—*Bayley*, vol. ii. p. 64.

|| *Bayley's History of the Tower*, p. 264.

¶ This chapel, which is within the White Tower, and altogether distinct from the

Few traditions propagated on such high authority as Sir Thomas More and Lord Bacon—men eminent for their learning, and yet more for their exalted stations as lord chancellors of England—would bear such strict scrutiny, with a view of disproving the rumour on which both admit that the tradition sprung. Thus it appears that the legend of the Bloody Tower, as connected with the murder of the princes, vanishes, by testing its validity on the sole basis on which it was reported to rest,*—the appellation supposed to commemorate the dreadful act not having been assumed until 100 years after the murder was reported to have been perpetrated;† and the bones, the discovery of which was considered to confirm the tradition, were found in another staircase, and in a part of the fortress far removed from that gateway, which, nevertheless, to this day continues to be shown as the place of their death and burial, notwithstanding the royal interment of the remains found elsewhere. Had Sir Thomas More and the biographer of Henry VII. ended their tale by the mere relation of the massacre and hurried interment, then, indeed, there might have appeared some ground for belief that the remains were those of the young princes: for the stairs leading from the royal apartments—a far more probable abode for the royal children than the porter's lodge‡—would have seemed a natural place for the assassins to have chosen for the concealment of the desperate act, and therefore conclusive evidence of the truth of the tale. But both these eminent men distinctly report that the bodies were removed by Richard's order, and buried "in a less vile corner;" "whereupon, another night, by the king's warrant renewed," (such are the strong words of Lord Bacon,§) "their bodies were removed by the priest of the Tower, and buried by him in some place which, by means of the priest's death soon after, could not be known;" and Sir Thomas More's||

sacred edifice wherein divine service has been for many years performed, is now called the Record Office.—*Bayley*, vol. i. p. 263.

* "A stronger proof we need not have that the name of the building did not originate in the circumstance in question, is its not having assumed the appellation till upwards of a century after the supposed act."—*Ibid.*, vol. i. p. 264.

† "Between the reign of Henry VIII., when this building was called the Garden Tower, and the year 1597, when it was known as the Bloody Tower, the Tower was crowded by delinquents of all descriptions; and as the structure in question was no doubt then frequently used as a prison, it more probably derived its present name from some of the horrid deeds which distinguished that era."—*Bayley*, vol. i. p. 264.

‡ It may be alleged that King Richard took possession, in all likelihood, of the royal apartments after his coronation, and removed his nephews to the Bloody Tower. In the absence of proof on that point, the fact can only be judged by analogy. King Edward IV. continually resided at the Tower, and for many years held his court in the palace there, where his predecessor was imprisoned; yet no mention is made of Henry VI. having been immured in apartments unbecoming his high estate; and notwithstanding this latter monarch is reputed to have been murdered in the Tower, neither history nor tradition commemorates menial apartments as the site of that dark and mysterious event. Even Sir Thomas More, who perpetuated the lamentation of Edward V., when informed of his uncle's coronation, makes no mention whatever of any removal from the place usually appointed to the royal prisoners. Richard III. was much too reserved, cautious and reflective to have prematurely laid himself open, by unnecessarily degrading the royal children to subsequent suspicion as regards his conduct towards them. "Is it to be supposed," asks Mr. Bayley, "whatever might have been the protector's design as to the ultimate fate of his nephews, that the princes were not lodged in royal apartments, and paid all the respect due to their rank? Is it likely that Richard should have had them shut up in the dark and wretched dwelling of one of the porters of the gates? If he had wanted in humanity, would policy have dictated such a course? No: it must at once have betrayed some foul design, without adding a jot to the facility of the perpetration."—*Bayley*, vol. i. p. 264.

§ *Life of Henry VII.*, p. 123.

|| *Life of Rycharde III.*, p. 132.

expression is, "whither the bodies were removed, they could nothing tell." If, therefore, credit is given to their having been first interred in or under the stairs, some credit must attach to the assertion, from the same source, of their having been removed from those stairs, and their remains duly deposited by the governor's chaplain in consecrated ground, and in a spot suitable to their noble birth. He was not commanded to remove the bodies from apprehension of discovery or suspicion of treachery, but, as asserted, from Richard's considering their burial at a "stair-foot," derogatory to the former exalted position of his nephews, "being too base for them that were king's children,"* an important consideration in testing the validity of these relics, because it coincides with Richard's general character, and with the religious feeling of the times. Apart, however, from this view, it would be preposterous to suppose that they would be exhumed from one stairs to be interred in another; or that if exhumed, their remains would be otherwise than laid at rest with the ordinary attentions to the illustrious dead, however secretly performed or scrupulously concealed.† Although the ecclesiastic, who is reputed to have undertaken the office, was dead, and that the place was known only to himself, yet Sir George Buck states that Dighton and Tyrrel's reputed confession was followed up by the examination of the spot where their victims were said to have been buried.‡ But nothing was discovered, although the digging at a "stair-foot," when the precise spot was pointed out, was as practicable in the reign of Henry VII. as that of Charles II. Little consideration seems to have been bestowed on the friable condition to which, in this latter reign, the remains would probably have been reduced after the interment of centuries, or that the detached bones would have crumbled into dust on exposure to the air. Decomposition almost immediately follows a violent death, above all, such an one as is reputed to have terminated the existence of the royal brothers, that of suffocation; "the feather-bed and pillows" being kept down by force "hard into their mouths, that within a while smothered and stifled them;"§ and a situation so damp as that of the Tower of London, erected on the banks of a river, would scarcely have favoured their preservation. Although relics carefully secured might possibly continue to a distant era sufficiently entire to admit of discussion with reference to identity if forthwith commenced, yet it is contrary to the ordinary course of nature that either the mortal remains of the young princes, or the chest into which they were hurriedly thrown could endure for the space of 200 years in the same state in which they were deposited under the peculiar circumstances stated. These mutilated remains were long exposed to the air, and subjected to the violence of the labourers, before even a rumour began to prevail respecting their probable identity with the missing princes. "The skull of one was broken, and many of the bones likewise," we are told; and also that "the workmen cast them and the rubbish away together."|| Yet these broken, scattered and decomposed remains,—to collect which labourers were obliged to sift this refuse when the report gained ground as to their connection with Sir Thomas More's tradition,—were definitely recognized as the skeletons of the young princes, and gravely pronounced to be the remains of adults, precisely of the ages required.

On a discovery thus vague and inconclusive has Richard the Third's guilt

* Bacon, p. 123.

† "They might have added, it was done *sub sigillo confessionis*, which may not be revealed."—Buck, lib. iii. p. 85.

‡ "For true it is, there was much diligent search made for their bodies in the Tower; all places opened and digged, that was supposed, but not found."—*Ibid.*

§ More, p. 131.

|| Sandford, p. 404.

been considered incontestably proved, despite of the untenable legend of the "Bloody Tower," the absence of all proof of Tyrrel and Warbeck's reputed confessions,* and the admitted fact that the revolting personal portrait so long given of this monarch has as little foundation in truth as the asserted removal of the bodies by the king's command, if, indeed, these were the remains of the royal youths said to be murdered by their uncle. "The personal monster whom More and Shakspeare exhibited, has vanished," states a powerful writer of the present day,† "but the deformity of the revolting parricide was surely revealed in the bones of his infant nephews!" Had these been the only bones which the credulity of later times transformed into the murdered remains of one or both of the princes, the power which a favourite hypothesis, once established, possesses to warp the judgment even of the most reflective, might, in this instance, be admitted as the cause why evidence so weak, and identity so vague, were overlooked in the plausibility which seemed to attach to the discovery. But the case of the relics found in the time of Charles II., and by him honoured with a royal interment, is not a solitary instance of remains coming to light which were fully believed to substantiate the tradition of King Richard's criminal conduct; and however ludicrous the statement may appear, yet it is an historical fact, that bones discovered years before these that are now under discussion in a lofty and unoccupied turret, and which were, at the time, generally believed to be the remains of the unfortunate Edward V., were afterwards allowed to be the skeleton of an ape! who, escaping from the menagerie, had clambered to the dangerous height, and too feeble to retrace his steps, had there perished.‡

So ready were the occupants of the Tower to appropriate every suspicious appearance towards elucidating a mystery, which, beyond all others of the startling events connected with the remarkable history of this national fortress, cast an air of melancholy interest and romance over its gloomy towers. Is it

* "King Henry's great and culpable omission in this instance," (the alleged confession of Warbeck,) "as in the case of the examination of Tyrrel and Dighton, was, in not openly publishing a statement, signed and verified by competent authorities, which would have been far more satisfactory than 'the court fumes,' which, adds Bacon, 'commonly print better (*i. e.*, more strongly impress themselves on the public mind) than printed proclamations.'"—*Documents relating to Perkin Warbeck, Archaeologia*, vol. xxvii. p. 153.

† D'Israeli, "Amenities of Literature," vol. ii. p. 105.

‡ "The weak constitutions and short lives of their sisters may be a natural proof to infer it probable enough that this prince died in the Tower; which some men of these times are brought to think, from certain bones, like to the bones of a child being found lately in a high desolate turret, supposed to be the bones of one of these princes; others are of opinion it was the carcass of an ape, kept in the Tower, that in his old age had happened into that place to die in, and having clambered up thither, according to the light and idle manner of those wanton animals, after, when he would have gone down, seeing the way to have been steep and the precipice so terrible, durst not adventure to descend, but for fear stayed and starved himself; and although he might be soon missed, and long sought for, yet was not easily to be found, that turret being reckoned a vast and damned place for height and hard access, nobody in many years looking into it."—Buck, lib. iii. p. 86.

"The identity of the bones," observes Mr. Laing, "is uncertain; the Tower was both a palace and a state prison, the receptacle of Lollards, heretics and criminals, within which those who died by disease or violence were always buried; the discovery, therefore, of bones is neither surprising nor, perhaps, uncommon; but we must guard against the extreme credulity perceptible in the officers, who, persuaded that the princes were secretly interred in the Tower, appropriated every skeleton to them. Bones found at a former period in a deserted turret, were regarded as the remains of one of the princes; though some entertained a ludicrous suspicion that they belonged to an old ape who had clambered thither and perished."—*Laing, (in Henry,)* vol. xii. p. 419.

just, however, to convict a monarch of England,—a Plantagenet by birth and descent, the last of a noble and gallant race,—of crimes which the mind shrinks from contemplating, on no more solid basis than mere rumour, the alleged proofs of which are so inconclusive, that even the lowest and most hardened criminal in this present day would pass unscathed through the ordeal? Has any other of our English sovereigns been convicted on such shallow evidence? Has King Henry I., the usurper of his brother's rights, and the author of his fearful sufferings, or King John, who wrested the throne from his nephew, and has been suspected even of putting him to death with his own hand, been vituperated with equal rancour? Does odium attach, except in a very modified degree, to Edward III., Henry IV., Edward IV., Henry VII., and Queen Elizabeth, all more or less implicated in the cruel execution of dethroned rivals or princely opponents? Whence then, is it, that to Richard III. has been applied every invective that can be heaped on the memory of the basest of men and the most ruthless of kings? It arose from the simple cause, that he was succeeded by the founder of a new dynasty,—a sovereign whose interest it was to load him with the vilest calumnies, and to encourage every report that could blacken his memory.* Hence, later chroniclers, to court the favour of Henry VII. and his posterity, adopted as real facts those reports which were at first raised merely to mislead, or at least satisfy the populace. Desirous of transmitting Richard III. to future ages in the most detestable light, from mental depravity they passed to personal deformity—“representing him as crooked and deformed, though all ancient pictures drawn of him show the contrary.”† Succeeding sovereigns sanctioning these accusations, so implicit became the belief in his guilt, that at length it mattered little whether it was the recent skeleton of a starved ape, or the decomposed remains of sifted bones, that aided to increase the odium, and still deeper to blacken the character of a prince prejudged as a ruthless murderer—condemned as an inhuman parricide. The mass of mankind are so prone to suspicion, that oft-repeated and long-received accusations will at length prevail even with the most ingenuous; and so feelingly alive is each individual to the frailty and weakness of human nature, that however noble may have been the career or honourable the actions of the character vituperated, if once the poisoned tongue of malice has singled out its object, neither purity of heart nor consciousness of innocence will protect the unhappy victim of malevolence from the stigma sought to be established, either to gratify private pique or further the views of political animosity.

Such was the position of Richard III. as regards the murder of his nephews. He may have been guilty, but this cannot be authenticated, for no evidence is on record, and no more substantial basis even for the accusation exists than the envenomed shaft of political malice. Although the plague raged many times fearfully within the metropolis,‡ precluding alike regular interments, and explaining irregular burials;§ although that greater scourge to mankind,

* Carte, vol. ii. book xiii. p. 818.

† Ibid.

‡ Shortly after the accession of King Henry VII., a fearful pestilence denominated “The Sweating Sickness,” almost depopulated the metropolis; and the execution of the young Earl of Warwick, in 1499, was followed by so devastating a plague, that the king, the queen and the royal family were obliged to leave the kingdom, and were resident at Calais for many weeks. During the “Great Plague” of 1665, the weekly bill of mortality amounted to 8000; and so awfully did it rage in the heart of the city, that between 400 and 500 a-week died in Cripplegate parish, and above 800 in Stepney.—*Brayley's Londiniana*, vol. iii. p. 220.

§ “The numbers of dead in the outposts were so great that it was impossible to bury them in due form or to provide coffins, no one daring to come into the infected houses.”—*Ibid.*, p. 216.

religious persecution, together with civil warfare, led to deeds of such fearful import, that many a tale of horror might be unfolded if the walls of the Tower could divulge the tragical scenes acted within them,—and which are now only in part suspected, or remain altogether unknown,—yet no one cause has ever been suggested to account for the broken chest and scattered remains found in the passage leading to the chapel, but that grounded on such slight foundation as the allegation against King Richard III.

Mysterious, indeed, is the fate of the young princes, and so it is likely to remain, unless future discoveries should bring to light some more conclusive cause for Richard's condemnation than “one,” out of “many rumours,” not promulgated until he, like his nephews, slumbered the sleep of death, and which took its rise in times when the reputation of the noblest characters was attacked with a disregard to truth and bitterness of feeling that are truly appalling. But those times have passed away, and the feuds that gave rise to such discordant passions being no longer in operation, however strongly appearances may seem to favour the imputation cast upon Richard III.; yet, as it is already admitted that “the personal monster whom Sir Thomas More and Shakspeare exhibited, has vanished,” it behoves all advocates for historical truth to suspend judgment in a case which has so long darkened the royal annals of England.

From the researches which are actively pursued in the present day, it is by no means impossible that some fresh documents may yet come to light which will lead to a knowledge of the facts, and thus afford legitimate cause for condemning or acquitting a monarch who, if not altogether free from the vices which pre-eminently marked his turbulent age, was not devoid of those nobler qualities which equally characterized the same chivalrous period, and which afford substantial ground for discrediting reports that are wholly at variance with the prudence and generosity of his youthful days, and are yet more strongly opposed to the discretion and wisdom which marked his kingly career.