INTRODUCTION

THE REIGN OF RICHARD II marks in many respects the culminating point in English medieval history. If Henry VII was, as has been claimed for him,[1] the last of the medieval kings of England, Richard II was the last of the old order, the last king ruling by hereditary right, direct and undisputed, from the Conqueror. He is also the last king of England to assert, though vainly, the fullness of the medieval kingly ideal—the ideal of that "almost uninterrupted succession of champions of personal power, passionate and lustful men, who loved domination, strife, war, and the chase".[2] After his violent deposition in 1399 nothing could ever be quite the same again; it was the end of an epoch. Medieval divine right lay dead, smothered in Pontefract castle, and the kings of the next hundred and ten years, medieval as they were in many respects and desperately as they tried to drag together the shredded rags of legitimacy, were essentially kings *de facto*, not *de jure*, successful usurpers recognised after the event, upon conditions, by their fellow-magnates or by parliament. Even Henry V, perhaps the strongest and the most medieval of the series, depended for five-sixths of his revenue on the goodwill of his subjects and could never quite live down the dubiety of his father's title and the precedent of unfortunate concessions exacted from his father's weakness.

It is true that the effective precedent afforded by the events of 1399 was for at least a century or two no more than a precedent of usurpation and that the Lancastrian parliamentary title was in the main imposed on those reluctant sovereigns after the event.[3]

[1] C. H. Williams, *The Making of the Tudor Despotism* (1935), p. 9.
[2] Ch. Petit-Dutaillis, *Studies Supplementary to Stubbs's Constitutional History*, English edition, iii, 310.
[3] G. T. Lapsley, "The Parliamentary Title of Henry IV", *English Historical Review*, xlix, 423 ff., 577 ff.

Even Henry IV (and how much more Edward IV and Henry VII) owed the throne not to the sovereign will of the English people, expressing itself through a representative assembly, but effectively to conquest, to some dim pretence of hereditary right and above all to the support of a few wealthy and powerful individuals and the vague fears of the propertied classes in general. All were saviours of society, in the limited medieval sense, against a threatened spoliation or, worse, disintegration. But with the gradual perfecting of the bureaucratic and remorseless Tudor machine of government, with the middle classes' growing sense of wealth, potential power and baffled individualism, old dreams of popular control over a despotic prince revived, and the desperate attempts of jealous fifteenth-century magnates and uneasy fifteenth-century lawyers and knights of the shire to drape and even strangle constitutional indelicacies were resurrected in a new form by a would-be squirearchy grown fat and kicking upon the spoils of the monasteries. In the fifteenth century theory had followed faintly after and had feebly endeavoured to distort fact; in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries men began with the theory. And so from the last years of Elizabeth's reign onwards there flows a stream of publications whose naked titles tell their own story.

Oddly enough the main fount of this stream is perhaps Shakespeare's *Richard II*; the first quarto appeared in 1597. It is of this play that Elizabeth is said to have exclaimed: "I am Richard II; know ye not that?" and there is little doubt that the subject of Richard II's deposition was a sore point with her and already an encouragement to her enemies: thus on the eve of Essex's rebellion in 1601 the leaders arranged to play *Richard II* (whether actually Shakespeare's play or another is doubtful) in order to encourage the conspirators. From that time to this Shakespeare has often been paradoxically cited as the best historian of Richard II's reign and, curiously, as the only historian to do full justice to Richard's point of view, yet, as Elizabeth and Essex knew, his general tone is really hostile, and though there are touches, drawn direct through Holinshed, of the friendly French chroniclers Creton and the author of the

Traïson et Mort, the groundwork is provided by that unfriendly Tudor, Edward Hall. Thus only the last three years of the reign, the most difficult to defend of all, figure in the play, and Richard is depicted as a weak-kneed tyrant, alternately unmanned by misfortune and drunk with success; his unpleasantness in the early stages is not atoned for by the pathos of the later scenes.[1] The real Richard was perhaps too fond of dramatising himself, but naturally not along these lines, and one feels that he might have protested with justice, though on different grounds, against Shakespeare and "Gordon Daviot" alike.

Shakespeare's *Richard II* was followed within a year or two by the appearance of a book (? 1599) entitled *The First Part of the Life and Raigne of King Henrie the IIII*; the author was a certain Sir John Hayward (1564–1627). Hayward's book strongly approves the deposition and was, moreover, dedicated in the usual extravagant terms to Essex. Hence Elizabeth ordered Bacon to read it with a view to discovering whether it concealed treason. Bacon reported in a famous phrase that he found in it no treason but many felonies, since the author had stolen much from Cornelius Tacitus. In spite of this, however, directions were given to remove the dedication and, eventually, to suppress the book, Hayward being brought before the Star Chamber and both he and the printer sentenced to imprisonment. Hayward was not released until after Essex's execution, but the attempt to suppress his history was none the less a failure, for several contemporary copies exist, all containing the offending dedication, and moreover they are all of such variety that it looks as if several presses had been used to keep pace with the demand.[2]

Seventeenth-century politics proved fertile ground for the legend, which began to flourish exceedingly. Its first-fruits are found in *An Historicall Narration of the Manner and Form of that Memorable Parliament which Wrought Wonders, begun at Westminster* 1386 *in the tenth yeare of the reign of King Richard the*

[1] H. Wallon, *Richard II*, i, 398–9.
[2] H. R. Plomer, *The Library*, iii (N.S.), 13–23.

second.—Related and published by Thomas Fannant, Clerke. Printed (significantly) *in the yeare* 1641. It was thought until quite recently that this tract was, as it pretends to be, a contemporary composition, but the researches of Miss May McKisack[1] have shown that it is actually a rough and incomplete translation of a pretentiously, not to say barbarously, written Latin version composed in 1388–9 by one Thomas Favent or Fovent, probably a clerk in the diocese of Salisbury and certainly a strong supporter of the appellants. It is also worth noting that in fact Favent deals principally with what is usually called the "merciless" parliament of 1388, to which, and not to that of 1386, his epithet "wonderful" should properly be assigned. The mistake, which has been incorporated in nearly all later histories, is of course due to the anonymous translator of the seventeenth century.

It was not long, however, before that century returned to Hayward's practice of rewriting fourteenth-century history instead of plagiarising fourteenth-century pamphleteers. In the year 1681 we have *The Life and Reign of King Richard the Second, By a Person of Quality*. This is wholly a réchauffé of the contemporary chroniclers Walsingham and Knighton, with special emphasis on their anti-curialist tendencies; it is, however, interesting for its reference to Richard's friends as a "cabal". The moral here is clearly that Charles II is as bad as Richard II, just as the translation of Favent was intended to suggest a comparison between the parliaments of 1388 and 1641. Finally, the revolution of 1688–9 produces, among its many *pièces justificatives*, a whole crop of such political histories, one anonymous, another by the Marquis of Halifax (both belonging to 1689), and yet another (1690) by Sir Robert Howard. All three of them are principally, and naturally, concerned for the first time with actual deposition; all three deal with Edward II as well as with Richard II; and their general object is to show that the events alike of 1327 and 1399 afforded precedents

[1] *Camden Miscellany*, vol. xiv (1926). Miss McKisack prints the newly discovered complete Latin text with critical notes and introduction.

for the parliamentary removal of princes obnoxious to the people.

This cumulative appeal to history from the time of Elizabeth to that of James II seems to justify Wallon[1] in referring to Richard II's reign as "l'époque où commence...la longue histoire de la Révolution en Angleterre". It culminates in the fine flower of the Whig revolution of 1688–9; the Glorious Revolution, "glorious" because it succeeded,[2] after which the English people may be said to have "constituted" itself, requiring no more political revolutions, though much evolution, ever since. Gradually the long years of silence between 1399 and 1599 came to be forgotten, as the seventeenth-century pamphleteers intended that they should be; Edward II and Richard II take their places at the beginning of one magnificent continuum, and the tradition is complete.

This tradition has been generally followed by most English historians up to the present century; by Hume and Hallam, by Green and Stubbs and Ramsay, a long and honourable procession. Thomas Carte in the eighteenth century and Lingard in the nineteenth mildly questioned it, while more recently Tout,[3] though hostile to Richard personally, doubts the historical value of the constitutional theory involved in the tradition but at the last turns back decisively to administrative history and refuses to answer the constitutional question. Among French historians Wallon, the author of the only full-length history of the reign, after showing much sympathy for Richard, is unable, in the absence of evidence which has since come to light, to modify substantially the orthodox English attitude towards the events of his last three years, while M. Perroy,[4] invaluable as his work is for foreign policy and relations with the papacy, is content, like the *Cambridge Medieval History*, to do little more than follow Tout for domestic affairs. Yet the tendency of most modern specialised research is away from the tradition, and

[1] *Op. cit.* i, p. iv.
[2] If we are to accept H. Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History*.
[3] *Chapters in Mediaeval Administrative History*, esp. iv, 64–5.
[4] *L'Angleterre et le grand schisme d'Occident*.

it certainly requires a re-examination of a different kind from the blind, sentimental vindication and romantic modernisation of Richard to be found in the works of certain historical novelists[1] and in that successful play, *Richard of Bordeaux*.

Such a re-examination must be predominantly political and constitutional, because it is in those fields that the real drama of the reign and the main historical perversions of it seem to lie, but that is not to say that in other and equally important respects the close of the fourteenth century does not mark an epoch in English history, or that these other considerations do not, many of them, affect directly the interpretation of Richard's character, politics and the constitution. There is, for example, the linked, but separate, drama of the Peasants' Revolt, that first great uprising of the submerged classes in England, that first attempt of "John Nameless and John the Miller and John the Carter . . . John Trueman and all his fellows" not only to think, but to act for themselves, fumblingly but spontaneously and on a wide scale. There is again the portentous appearance of Wyclif and his followers. True, Wyclif is essentially a schoolman who looks backwards rather than forwards, and we are told we must no longer regard him as in any sense a morning-star; yet the first appearance of heresy on a large scale in England is an event of inescapable importance, while Wyclif's own subtle dialectic, medieval as it was, is accompanied by his sponsoring of the first vernacular Bible. Moreover, Lollardry apart, the persistent anti-papal legislation of the period, taken in conjunction with the Great Schism in the Church, suggests, to say the least of it, some impending change in medievalism.

In literature the period is marked by the first great burst of vernacular excellence in English history; Chaucer and Langland immeasurably outstrip all English predecessors. They are also the earliest poets whom a modern Englishman, uninstructed in Anglo-Saxon or Middle English, can hope to understand. Yet of the two it is only Langland, the rougher, sadder poet of the

[1] E.g. Gillian Olivier, *The Broomscod Collar* (1930); cf. Sir Henry Newbolt's *The New June*. F. Converse, *Long Will*, deals principally with the Peasants' Revolt.

popular awakening, who, however unintentionally,[1] could produce a revolutionary effect, for Chaucer was no more political than mystical and far from primitive; though writing in English, he was the polished, *fin de siècle* poet of a cosmopolitan society unified in a kind of bastard chivalry, and his work is far more complex and sophisticated than is commonly allowed. There are also minor poets, anonymous political lampoonists, the tedious Gower and that worthy but insufferable civil servant, Thomas Hoccleve.

Finally, in art and architecture Richard's reign represents the last great effort of the English Middle Ages. It sees the perfection of the Perpendicular Style, the building of Westminster Hall and New College chapel, and the final triumph, of technique at least, in the draughtsmanship of monumental brasses and in the carving of effigies in the round.[2] Everywhere in the wool-growing districts the great wool-merchants' churches, adorned with stained glass at its loveliest, were beginning to arise; college was added to college in Oxford and Cambridge. Painting, carried to its limits in the art of book-illumination, spread to panels and church walls; more, the two greatest pictures ever known to have been painted in medieval England are, one certainly, and another probably, portraits of the young king. Richard II, like Henry III, was undoubtedly himself a connoisseur of building, sculpture, painting, books and music, as well as of plate, jewellery and dress; there is on record plentiful, if scattered, evidence of these tastes which has never been put together. If for no other reason he should go down to history as the inventor of the handkerchief,[3] the *chef d'œuvre* of a dilettante of genius. Yet the dilettante,

[1] It is the accepted view of scholars such as R. W. Chambers that Langland, if he preached anything, preached resignation. None the less his mysticism is politically dynamic in a sense that Chaucer's work never was.

[2] Cf. Arthur Gardner, *English Medieval Sculpture*. The work of the thirteenth century is spiritually greater, but its mastery over material is less complete, and alabaster as a medium was first introduced in this age.

[3] *parvis peciis factis ad liberandum domino regi ad portandum in manu sua pro naso suo tergendo et mundando*: M. V. Clarke, *Fourteenth Century Studies*, p. 117.

almost connoisseur, is only one aspect, if the most neglected, of the complex personality developed by the sheltered boy who so unexpectedly faced the Peasants' Revolt. There is the distracted son of a professional soldier and an almost equally professional beauty, torn between a desire upon the one hand to emulate, more successfully than his fellows, the impossible standards of knightly prowess bequeathed to a too slight physical frame, and on the other an almost morbid consciousness of the kingly dignity and the necessity of not betraying it. There is the passionate and loyal friend and husband of early manhood, corrupted into bitterness and cynicism by personal insult and the judicial murder of his companions. There is the defender of the church, orthodox and sincerely religious to the last, yet strangely averse from the newfangled idea of burning his subjects when they happened to be heretics.[1] There is the unbalanced widower, half-hearted autocrat and pitiful neurotic of the later years. All these, and many others, are aspects of the more than usually intricate character of the last truly medieval king of England. Any one of them, given the tortuous politics in the background, the uneasy stirring of new forces, unorientated as yet and seeking a direction, towards the close of the Middle Ages, affords an excuse for studying him; taken together, they constitute a problem whose difficulty is only equalled by its fascination. But before beginning the attempt to unravel it, to reinterpret Richard as the essentially medieval product of a medieval generation, something must be said of this background, of the state of politics at home and abroad, but especially at home, since it was these which first affected him, at his accession in June 1377.

[1] Cf. H. G. Richardson, "Heresy and the Lay Power under Richard II", *E.H.R.* li, 1–28.

CHAPTER I

The State of Politics at the Accession of Richard II

IT has been well said that "no accession ever marked less of an epoch than did that of Richard II".[1] There is in fact so little of a break in 1377 that it is necessary to go back as far as 1369 in order to understand the complexities of the position and to trace the emergence of the leading personalities. For in 1369 there is a decisive break, for France as well as England, in the course of fourteenth-century history; it is the year in which France begins to reap the fruits of her new king's policy, while England, after the glories of the first part of the Hundred Years' War, suddenly enters upon a period of "military disaster and economic exhaustion".[2] The Peace of Bretigny (1360) had in fact been the high-water mark both of Edward III's policy and his personal prestige, but before 1369 nobody realised it.

Elsewhere in Europe the year was not particularly eventful. In Bohemia Charles IV, the greatest and most realistic of late medieval emperors, was quietly building up the fortunes of the house of Luxemburg—a policy of little concern to anyone except perhaps to the Electors, to the Wittelsbachs, the Hapsburgs and any other rival dynasty in Germany. In spite of his two visits to Italy he had practically renounced the most fruitful principle of discord, imperial interest in that country, and he was beginning to grow old. It was three hundred years since Canossa and he was on excellent, if distant, terms with the sainted pope Urban V. Urban was more troubled; in 1367 his conscience had driven him from the safety and comforts of Avignon back to a dangerous and half desolate Rome; the loud

[1] Tout, *Chapters*, iii, 324.
[2] G. Unwin, Introduction to *Finance and Trade under Edward III*, p. xiii.

protests of his cardinals and the genuine insecurity of central Italy were to bring him back to die upon the banks of the Rhône in 1370. But the spell of the Babylonish captivity had been broken and the seeds of the Great Schism had been sown.

The only other powers that directly concerned England at this time were, besides France, Flanders and Castile. In Flanders the main English wool-market was controlled by the Francophil Louis de Maele, who had become count of Flanders at the age of sixteen when his father was killed at Crécy. He was a peculiarly unpleasing specimen of late medieval class arrogance —the type of knight who did not think it necessary to keep his word to "villeins" and classed as villeins the inhabitants of the great cloth-producing cities. Even Louis de Maele, however, had not been able to prevent the artisans of Ghent from recovering their municipal liberties in 1359, a fact which drove him more than ever in the direction of France. Now, ten years later, he was about to auction the hand of his heiress, Margaret, and the English bid would have to be a high one.

France since 1364 had been ruled by the sickly and unattractive, but extremely able, Charles V, the Wise. He had reformed his army and found a captain of the first rank in du Guesclin, the poor knight of Rennes. Within two years he had broken the power of his most dangerous enemy, Charles the Bad of Navarre, and had forced the Montfort duke of Brittany to acknowledge the suzerainty of the French royal house. The next problem was to dispose of the free companies of mercenaries who were ravaging what was left of France. It was decided to get rid of them by intervening in the question of the Castilian crown, then in dispute between Pedro the Cruel, a protégé of Navarre and England, and Henry of Trastamara, the candidate of Peter IV, the Ceremonious, king of Aragon. In April 1366 du Guesclin at the head of his free companies set Henry on the throne of Castile, but he was driven out again in the following year by his rival, who had successfully invoked the Black Prince from Bordeaux. But the campaign of Navarrete, while apparently undoing Charles's work, was actually of the greatest benefit to France; for it was fought with much the same