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# RICHARD II

BY

ANTHONY STEEL

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Cardiff*

WITH A FOREWORD BY

G. M. TREVELYAN, O.M.

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Illuminated initial, enlarged to full page, from MS. of Roger Dymok’s *Twelve Errors of the Lollards*, Trinity Hall, Cambridge. Probably a portrait of Richard II, c. 1395 *facing page vi*

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### *Note on the plate opposite*

The following particulars are taken from Dr A. H. Lloyd's *Early History of Christ's College* (Cambridge, 1934), p. 10.

No. 17 in Dr M. R. James's catalogue of the manuscripts in the possession of Trinity Hall, Cambridge, is entitled *Rogeri Dymok, Liber contra duodecim errores et hereses Lollardorum*, and is attributed by Dr James to the late fourteenth century. Dr Lloyd adds:

On the first page the initial has a portrait of King Richard II throned, and the royal arms (France ancient and England quarterly) are blazoned in colours on the right-hand margin, while on the bottom margin is his badge, *stags sejant guardant gorged crowned and chained or* . . . Dr James regards it as a copy made for presentation to the King.

After having two intervening owners it passed into the hands of William Byngnam (c. 1390–1451), first founder of Christ's College, from whom in turn, after having at least two more known owners, it passed *via* Robert Hare (d. 1611) to Trinity Hall.



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## FOREWORD

THE REIGN OF RICHARD II has interested people more, perhaps, than any other equally brief period of English medieval history, because of its social and religious happenings. Whether or not it is the period that best represents “the break up of the medieval system”, is a question of definition. For “the Middle Ages” began to “break up” in England in the twelfth century as regards the first inroads on the manorial organisation of servile labour; and medieval institutions will not have disappeared from our land unless and until some authoritarian system succeeds in abolishing our Parliament, our Universities, our Churches and our Common Law. In short, the Middle Ages began to come to an end before the fourteenth century and have not finished coming to an end yet. But, in this long-drawn-out process, the reign of Richard II holds a peculiarly important place. For in it the Peasants’ Rising of 1381 dramatically illustrated the evolution of the manorial economy into a more modern system, and the rise of Lollardry brought into being the first great heretical movement of English origin, with many distinctively “protestant” features.

And therefore Wyclif and the Peasants’ Rising—and Chaucer and Langland to boot—have attracted much attention to the period covered by the life of Richard II. But the biography and psychology of that unfortunate prince, and the purely political struggle between him and his enemies, which to Shakespeare represented the whole content of his reign, these things also are not without interest, whether we regard them as “constitutional developments” or as a mere political struggle for power between selfish factions.

These political events, and the biography of Richard II, have of recent years been subjected to much learned analysis, and Mr Steel has in this volume done a real service to historians and to the reading public in composing a critical and coherent narrative by a collation of the works of these specialists.

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## FOREWORD

Mr Steel's scholarly equipment for the task is undoubted, and the reader may have the satisfaction of feeling that he is being told as much of the truth about these intricate and ill-reported happenings as can now be gleaned.

Possibly the chief impression left by a perusal of the book will be an increased sense of the little wisdom and less honesty with which the world used to be governed in ages gone by. The feudal governing class of that day, in its management of high politics foreign and domestic, here appears as even more uneducated and ill-fitted to rule England than the various ruling classes which have succeeded it—the country gentlemen, the bourgeois, the trade unionists. Yet even these selfish warrior nobles and Caesarian clergy did not permanently ruin England or prevent the evolution in the long run of higher types of society.

G. M. TREVELYAN

## PREFACE

THIS book is an attempt to make one coherent whole out of the minutiae, and in certain instances the larger monographs, of recent scholars. The picture of Richard II which emerges, limited though it is to Richard in his political function, seems to me worth the presentation in that I believe it to be largely different from the political pictures of Richard which we have been given in the past. This in itself is understandable, for only one full-length portrait has ever been attempted hitherto (H. Wallon, *Richard II*, 2 vols. Paris, 1864), and although Wallon's work has great and obvious merits much has been discovered since his day.<sup>1</sup>

Forty years ago Professor Trevelyan's *England in the Age of Wycliffe* reached a public which had never heard of Wallon and inspired more students than its author modestly allows, while in the present century the great work of Tout has exposed administrative foundations hitherto unknown; M. Perroy has rewritten the foreign policy of Richard and his governments; and the trenchant studies of the late Miss M. V. Clarke, aided in one important instance by Professor Galbraith, have thrown completely new light on the major crises of the reign. Professor Tait, Mr G. T. Lapsley, Mr J. G. Edwards, Mr H. G. Richardson, and very many others whose names will be found in my footnotes and my bibliography, have laboured fruitfully in the field; if I have sometimes misunderstood their often intricate and always learned arguments I hereby offer my apologies; it is rarely indeed that I have ventured to differ from them.

I am particularly indebted not only to Professor Trevelyan for his Foreword but also to Dr Helen M. Cam, who has been good enough to read the whole book at an early stage in typescript and to make a number of suggestions, nearly all of

<sup>1</sup> Notably Adam of Usk's and the Dieulacres chronicles, together with the true relationship of Creton and the *Traïson et Mort de Richard II*.

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## PREFACE

which I have adopted. I also have to acknowledge with thanks the courtesy of the Master and Fellows of Trinity Hall, Cambridge, in permitting me to reproduce a hitherto unknown portrait of Richard II from an illuminated manuscript in the possession of the college. That this manuscript was once the property of William Byngham, the first founder of Christ's College, Cambridge, has naturally given it an added interest in my own eyes, but it has been more than a mere act of piety on my part to choose it for my frontispiece; for in depicting Richard as a sick man and prematurely old at thirty the unknown artist seems to me to have expressed precisely the interpretation of his later years which I had reached myself some time before the late Dr A. H. Lloyd drew my attention to his work. It is an odd coincidence that the treatise which he decorated should have been Roger Dymok's *Liber contra duodecim errores et hereses Lollardorum*, seeing that I have as far as possible omitted any mention of Wyclif and the Lollards from this book, but few people will dispute the thesis that Lollardry and the story of its founder constitute a separable problem of great difficulty and intricacy which has little to do with the development of Richard's character or the general course of political events during his reign. I have touched on both where absolutely necessary, but it was impossible to cover all the ground—indeed there are many other omissions of which I am just as conscious—and I hope that as the book stands it has a certain unity. Meanwhile, for the general background of the reign the reader may refer to Professor Trevelyan's classic work, already mentioned, to Dr G. G. Coulton's *Chaucer and his England*, or to the many other well-known studies mentioned in my bibliography.

I should have liked to dedicate this book to the memory of Miss M. V. Clarke, but in the first place, to my lasting regret, I had not the honour of her personal acquaintance, and in the second place it falls too far short of what she herself would have written on the theme but for her tragically early death.

ANTHONY STEEL

Cambridge 1940