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Edited by John Capgrave and Francis Charles Hingeston
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Rerum Britannicarum Medii Aevi Scriptores, or The Chronicles and Memorials of Great Britain and Ireland during the Middle Ages, usually referred to as the 'Rolls Series', was an ambitious project first proposed to the British Treasury in 1857 by Sir John Romilly, the Master of the Rolls, and quickly approved for public funding. Its purpose was to publish historical source material covering the period from the arrival of the Romans to the reign of Henry VIII, 'without mutilation or abridgement', starting with the 'most scarce and valuable' texts. A 'correct text' of each work would be established by collating 'the best manuscripts', and information was to be included in every case about the manuscripts used, the life and times of the author, and the work's 'historical credibility', but there would be no additional annotation. The first books were published in 1858, and by the time it was completed in 1896 the series contained 99 titles and 255 volumes. Although many of the works have since been re-edited by modern scholars, the enterprise as a whole stands as a testament to the Victorian revival of interest in the middle ages.

Liber de Illustribus Henricis

John Capgrave (1393–1464) was the Prior of Bishop's Lynn, and the most learned Augustinian friar of his time. Although he was the author of forty-one scholarly works, only twelve survive. This work was dedicated to King Henry VI and chronicles the lives of other great Henries, including six emperors of Germany and six kings of England (including the dedicatee himself). Largely compilations of other sources, his extensive accounts demonstrate the breadth of the scholarship for which he was known. This annotated edition was commissioned as part of the Rolls Series, a project designed, in an early campaign for ease of access to scholarly material, to put more historical sources into print. Edited by F.C. Hingeston and first published in 1858, it includes Capgrave's full Latin text and a glossary, thorough biographical notes, and chapter-by-chapter summaries, offering a useful resource for students of medieval history.

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Liber de Illustribus Henricis

JOHN CAPGRAVE
EDITED BY
FRANCIS CHARLES HINGESTON



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RERUM BRITANNICARUM MEDII ÆVI
SCRIPTORES,

OR

CHRONICLES AND MEMORIALS OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND IRELAND

DURING

THE MIDDLE AGES.

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THE CHRONICLES AND MEMORIALS
OF
GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND
DURING THE MIDDLE AGES.

PUBLISHED BY THE AUTHORITY OF HER MAJESTY'S TREASURY, UNDER THE
DIRECTION OF THE MASTER OF THE ROLLS.

ON the 26th of January 1857, the Master of the Rolls submitted to the Treasury a proposal for the publication of materials for the History of this Country from the Invasion of the Romans to the Reign of Henry VIII.

The Master of the Rolls suggested that these materials should be selected for publication under competent editors without reference to periodical or chronological arrangement, without mutilation or abridgment, preference being given, in the first instance, to such materials as were most scarce and valuable.

He proposed that each chronicle or historical document to be edited should be treated in the same way as if the editor were engaged on an *Editio Princeps*; and for this purpose the most correct text should be formed from an accurate collation of the best MSS.

To render the work more generally useful, the Master of the Rolls suggested that the editor should give an account of the MSS. employed by him, of their age and their peculiarities; that he should add to the work a brief account of the life and times of the author, and any remarks necessary to explain the chronology; but no other note or comment was to be allowed, except what might be necessary to establish the correctness of the text.

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The works to be published in octavo, separately, as they were finished; the whole responsibility of the task resting upon the editors, who were to be chosen by the Master of the Rolls with the sanction of the Treasury.

The Lords of Her Majesty's Treasury, after a careful consideration of the subject, expressed their opinion in a Treasury Minute, dated February 9, 1857, that the plan recommended by the Master of the Rolls "was well calculated for the accomplishment of this important national object, in an effectual and satisfactory manner, within a reasonable time, and provided proper attention be paid to economy, in making the detailed arrangements, without unnecessary expense."

They expressed their approbation of the proposal that each chronicle and historical document should be edited in such a manner as to represent with all possible correctness the text of each writer, derived from a collation of the best MSS., and that no notes should be added, except such as were illustrative of the various readings. They suggested, however, that the preface to each work should contain, in addition to the particulars proposed by the Master of the Rolls, a biographical account of the author, so far as authentic materials existed for that purpose, and an estimate of his historical credibility and value.


In compliance with the order of the Treasury, the Master of the Rolls has selected for publication for the present year such works as he considered best calculated to fill up the chasms existing in the printed materials of English history; and of these works the present is one.

*Rolls House,
December 1857.*

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JOHANNES CAPGRAVE
DE ILLUSTRIBUS HENRICIS.





ciones a quarū et nūmūm facte sunt in hieme
 et in estate plura incendia ex quibz signis nō
 multū p̄dixere ipsum bellicosum futurum et
 plura p̄icula guerrarum exp̄turum. In p̄imo
 pio eius regni consp̄avit contra dñm regem
 quidam dominus iohannes old castel dicitis
 qui fautorz septe heretice fuit p̄ mā giltrum io
 hannem wiche introduxte. Sic. l. old castel ad
 ductus ad regem et accusatus p̄pter plura docti

MS. BRIT. MUS. COTTON. Tib. A. VIII. fol. 60^b

Drag & San, luthy. in thyr Quren.

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JOHANNIS CAPGRAVE
LIBER
DE ILLUSTRIBUS HENRICIS.

EDITED

BY THE REV.

FRANCIS CHARLES HINGESTON, M.A.,
OF EXETER COLLEGE, OXFORD.

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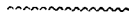
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GENERAL INTRODUCTION.
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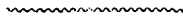
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GENERAL INTRODUCTION.



THE "Liber de Illustribus Henricis" was compiled at several different periods during the reign of Henry the Sixth. The Writer's immediate object, as he does not hesitate to avow, was the praise and glory of his King; hence the somewhat remarkable title of his Work.¹ John Capgrave undertook, as he tells us himself,² in order that he might promote his sovereign's desire to follow the example of the best men, to publish a book, into which he should collect, from the writings of others who had gone before, the praises of those who had borne the name of Henry. He could not find out any fixed etymology of the name; if it came from the Hebrew, which was most likely, he was satisfied with the significations of the separate syllables composing it; he was sure that it was a good name,—at all events it was the name of his King, and that was enough for "the least of Doctors, a little one among the Hermit Friars of S. Augustin," to know. Henry the Sixth was a pious monarch, and well disposed towards the Church; and he was

Reasons for
writing this
Work.

¹ The title of the "Henriade" of Voltaire is similar.

² See the Dedication, pp. 2, 3.

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the scion, too, of a noble stock: the lives of Six Emperors bearing the name of Henry, of six Henries Kings of England, of twelve illustrious men who had flourished in different parts of the world, all Henries, were to be written for his private edification and to do him honour in the eyes of his subjects,—were to be written “in order that this name might be called “illustrious on all accounts, not only by reason of the “majesty of Emperors, but also of the power of Kings, “the courage of soldiers, the learning of the clergy who “had borne it.”¹ The old monk wrote in the hope that the troubles which then beset his sovereign might be removed speedily; that that Parisian Mother, who had crowned him, might yet give to him many faithful and well-affected sons; and that his no less beloved London Mother would soon vomit forth her foulness, and receive her King again with glory.²

The “Chronicle” and the “Henries.”

Such were the circumstances under which the present interesting and in every way remarkable Work was written; such the motives by which its Author was actuated; and such the somewhat singular plan which he adopted of showing his fidelity towards his unfortunate King, and his sympathy with him in his sorrows. It is a less easy matter to estimate the historical value of such a production than that of the same Writer’s “Chronicle of England,” to which the “Henries” may, in some degree, be considered to be supplemental. In the latter he allowed himself so wide a scope that he could not well fall into the narrowness of views and timidity of style which are to a considerable extent characteristic of the former. There he freely praised or blamed, as praise seemed to be merited or blame required: here almost all is praise; he cannot suffer any rude hand to touch the

¹ See p. 180.

² See the Dedication, p. 4.

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garment of a Henry; and, fearing he might be led in the course of the narrative to do so himself, he takes care to provide in the outset against such a contingency.—“Those rulers of the world,” he says, “who deserve to be reckoned in the number of the illustrious Henries, were not blinded with the error of Paganism, nor without penitence called from the world, but were most Christian men, firm in faith, peaceful in manners; and if, through the activity of the tempter, or the allurements of the flesh, they committed any evil, they were cleansed by salutary repentance.”¹

A comparison of these two histories throws no little light upon Capgrave’s character as a politician, and therefore, to some extent, as a fair and impartial historian. The one enables us to understand the other. Each Work is dedicated to a King; the former to Henry the Sixth, the latter to Edward the Fourth. Capgrave was born in 1393, in the reign of Richard the Second, and may be said to have seen, though he was only six years old at the time, the downfall of the Plantagenets, and the crown seized by Henry, Duke of Lancaster. He lived to celebrate the praises of the latter, to tell of the short but noble career of his son and successor, to see the last sovereign of the House of Lancaster an exile, and to dedicate to Edward of York the Chronicle, which he had been long engaged in compiling. His devotion to Edward the Fourth, as it is with vehemence expressed in the Dedication to him of that Work, almost implied adverse feelings towards the fallen House, and these he is not only at no pains to conceal, but exhibits them boldly:—“Ferthermore zet fynde I a grete con-
 “veniens in zoure tytil, that ze be cleped Edward

¹ See p. 6.

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Introductory.

“ the Fourt. He that entered be intrusion was Herry
 “ the Fourte. He that entered by Goddis provision
 “ is Edward the Fourt. The similitude of the repara-
 “ cioune is ful lich the werk of the transgression, as
 “ the Cherch singith in a Preface,—‘ Because Adam
 “ ‘ trespased etyng the frute of a tre, therfor was
 “ ‘ Crist nayled on a tree.’ We trew loveres of this
 “ lond desire this of oure Lord God, that al the
 “ erreure wech was browte in be Herry the Fourte
 “ may be redressed be Edward the Fourte. This is
 “ the desire of many good men here in erde, and, as
 “ I suppose, it is the desire of the everlasting hillis
 “ that dwelle above.”¹

It seems hardly credible that the Writer of this paragraph could have penned the account of the “ intrusion” referred to, which is found in the present volume; especially as he takes care to tell us, by way of introduction to the latter, that he was at some trouble to compile a fair and impartial statement of the history of that eventful period. “ Forasmuch,” he says,² “ as different writers have given different accounts of the deposition of King Richard and the elevation of King Henry to the throne,—and no wonder, since, in so great a struggle, one took one side, and one the other,—I, who stand as it were in the middle between the two parties, consider that I hold a better and a safer path, since, having investigated both sides of the question, I set myself diligently to elucidate the truth alone, not, indeed, to the prejudice of any one who may write of these things after me, if he shall undertake to discuss this matter with more accuracy and clearness.” So much for the introduction; now for the character he gives of the monarch whom he was so shortly after

¹ See the *Chronicle of England*, p. 4. | ² See p. 102.

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able to compare to the first Adam, and rejoice over the “reparacioune” of “the werk of his transgression.”¹ Introduce the “reparacioune” of “the werk of his transgression.”¹ tory. First we are told that he was “glorious in his generation and kind to the Church, even before he “received the reins of government.”¹ “When many “injuries had been committed against him, he crossed “the sea, and with devout reverence visited the Holy “Places;”² for “seeing himself threatened with danger, “he converted worldly strife, as far as he was concerned, into a holy pilgrimage.”³ And when in 1399 the Duke “happened to land on our shores, he “committed his own cause and that of the people to “God; and by the advice of the lords, and in accordance with the decision of the people, offered to encounter the danger in his own person, as the “guardian of the realm and the upholder of justice.”⁴ Gradually Capgrave becomes more explicit. King Richard, “according to the trite proverb of the Psalmist, dug a pit, and fell into it himself, and, by the “permission of God, those whom he had unjustly “punished were greatly exalted, while himself was “taken away from their midst.”⁵ Arriving at the important point, the question of the succession, our Author states that the Duke of Lancaster claimed the crown “by reason of relationship of blood, which he “proved by ancient records.”⁶ Of these, indeed, he confesses that he had not as yet seen “the true “copies,” but he had “heard that it was at that “time alleged on his behalf, that he had descended “from the more honourable and elder son, whose line “was in consequence nearer to the kingdom.”⁷ “And,” he continues, after giving other reasons for

¹ See p. 98.

² *Ibid.*

³ See p. 99.

⁴ See p. 101.

⁵ See p. 102.

⁶ See p. 107.

⁷ *Ibid.*

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Introduc-
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his claim and mentioning his coronation, "so the said
 " Henry gained the crown, by the providence, as we
 " believe, of God, Who is mighty to put down the
 " mighty from their seat, and to exalt the humble."

It is impossible to defend our Author from the
 imputation of sycophancy, but the failing was a
 common one in his day; and, although we cannot
 but wish that the case had been otherwise, and
 wonder at such weakness in a man of undoubted
 learning and recognised influence, we must not forget
 that he whose motives we judge and criticise lived in
 times very different from our own; the error which
 would be intolerable in a writer of the present cen-
 tury, and was something more than questionable in a
 Dryden, is almost excusable in honest old John Cap-
 grave, who was clearly not a respecter of persons, but
 loved and revered the King of the time being, who-
 ever he might happen to be, simply because he was the
 King. He cared less about the distinction between
 the Houses of Lancaster and York than about the
 kind Sovereign who "took the place of the Hermit
 " Friars of S. Augustin, in the town of Lynn, into
 " his favour,"¹ and the "benigne Lord," who consented
 to "receyve his bok, thouz it were simplil:"² he could
 wish for the former "firm power, prosperous counsel,
 " and settled rule," and, when times were changed,
 could send to the latter, "prayer, obediens, subjeccion,
 " and al that evir, be ony deute, a prest schuld offir
 " onto his Kyng."³

The credi-
 bility of the
 Historian.

While, therefore, it is necessary to bear in mind
 this tendency, and to interpret accordingly some of
 the extravagant statements which are to be found
 scattered through the present Work, it is no less

¹ See p. 137.

² See the *Chronicle of England*, p. 2.

³ *Ibid.* p. 1.

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necessary to remember that the general truthfulness of the Author and the accuracy of the information which he gives us are, after all, but little affected by it. Whatever his motives for sitting down to write may have been, he evidently wrote with honesty and sincerity of purpose. Where he borrows, and he borrows largely, he does it with judgment and care, often throwing light upon the elder Chroniclers by the way in which he puts together their statements, and the new dress in which he exhibits them. When he is drawing near to his own time, and written authorities fail him, he is careful to tell us that he is not setting down events rashly or at random, but “as those testify who were present on the particular occasions, and are still alive.”¹ For instance, when describing the character of Henry the Fourth, he tells us that “he has known men of great literary attainments, who used to enjoy intercourse with him, and who have said that he was a man of very great ability, and of so tenacious a memory that he used to spend great part of the day in solving and unravelling hard questions.”²

The credibility of the Historian.

His authority in this instance might have been good, as he says, but he does not always employ the same discretion in judging of the value of statements which had come to him by mere hearsay. Though he “had not seen the true copies of the ancient records” by which the same King tried to prove his right to the throne, he is satisfied to “have heard that he was descended from the more honourable and elder son.”³

In another place, speaking of the marriage of the Princess Philippa, daughter of Henry IV., he mentions that “during the continual infirmities which

¹ See p. 102.

² See p. 108.

³ See p. 107.

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The credi- “ oppressed King Eric, her husband, all the causes
 bility of the “ of the kingdom were laid before her, and that by
 Historian. “ her prudent counsel she brought everything to a
 “ prosperous issue,” and he adds—“ they say so who
 “ know her.”

Again, in the Chapter on Henry the Sixth, he professes to write only what he has learned by hearsay, and commences the next sentence with the words, “ *Informatione multorum accepi.*”¹ Sometimes, but not frequently, his narrative assumes a personal aspect. When the Princess Philippa sailed for Norway, he stood on the pier at Lynn, and saw her embark. When Henry the Sixth was born, he was in London, a witness of the people’s joy, and heard the rejoicings and the loud ringing of the bells in honour of the birth of the royal infant.² Later, when the child had become a man, and was King, when he laid the foundation stone of the College at Eton, he was there and saw the ceremony, and he witnesses to the conspicuous devotion of the King. Master William Millington, the first Provost of King’s College, Cambridge, was an acquaintance of his own.³ When Henry the Sixth was making his pilgrimage to English shrines, and visited the house of the Austin Friars at Lynn, he was there, and was the chief spokesman on the occasion.⁴ When some jealous monks, or unruly laymen, had approached the King, and insinuated that the monks of Lynn were wily, and had taken him in, he undertakes his own defence and theirs.

It will be seen that Capgrave was at some pains to convince those who should read his book that he had done his best to make it worthy of their confidence; like others who had written before him, he

¹ See p. 128.

² See p. 127.

³ See p. 133.

⁴ See pp. 137 *et seqq.*

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could do nothing more than compile the history of the events which took place before he was born; concerning later events, he wrote nothing which he did not know himself either from personal experience or the testimony of acquaintances; but, in the former case, he had made his selections with care, endeavouring to write concisely and compendiously, and he had weighed well the evidence of his friends. The result of his labour is not unworthy of the pains bestowed upon it, and will be accepted as a genuine contribution to the history of his own century, and an intelligent commentary on the records of those which preceded it.

The credibility of the Historian.

The Work is divided into three distinct Parts, each having its own separate Dedication. The First Part relates only to the History of the Empire, and extends from the election of Henry I. the Fowler, to the end of the reign of the Emperor Henry the Sixth, namely from the year 918 to the year 1198, when the latter Sovereign died, and the interregnum of Philip of Suabia commenced.

Of the three Parts of the Work.

The Second Part (which is the longest of the three, and in many respects the most valuable,) is devoted to English History; it extends from the accession of Henry the First, in the year 1100, to the year 1446, which was the twenty-fourth year of the reign of King Henry the Sixth.

The Third Part, which is very interesting and curious, may be said to be concerned with Universal History, containing, as it does, "the lives of illustrious men who have borne the name of Henry, scattered throughout the whole world, and of different degrees and dignities."¹ These biographies are not arranged chronologically, but it may be useful to know that they extend over a period of three hun-

¹ See p. 141.

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xx GENERAL INTRODUCTION.

Of the three Parts of the Work. dred and seventy-five years, the earliest date being the year 1031, and the latest the year 1406. It will be necessary to describe each Part, and, to a great extent, each Chapter, separately.

Of Part I. The First Part consists of six Chapters, each containing a short sketch of an Emperor of the name of Henry. It is almost superfluous to remark that it is a mere compilation, the only portions pretending to originality being the connecting links between the stories, whenever the writer thought that such connection was necessary, and a few moral reflections, occurring here and there, on any points of the history which attracted his attention, or appealed to his prejudices or sympathies. Instances are his eulogy on Henry the First, on account of that Monarch's devotion towards the Sacred Spear;¹ his justification of the vengeance wreaked by Henry the Second on certain rebels, by quoting the example of Solomon;² his conjectures as to the descent of Henry the Fourth, when he was at a loss for information on account of the silence of the Authors whose writings he was able to consult.³

The sources from which it is derived. The sources from which he has derived the bulk of his matter are, the Chronicle of Martinus Polonus and the Chronicle or "Pantheon" (as it is called) of Godfrey of Viterbo. He has also consulted the Chronicle of Vincent of Beauvais, and derived an anecdote from S. Jerome's Commentary on the Prophecy of Isaiah. Into a long passage, borrowed from Godfrey of Viterbo, he has introduced, with the words—"Sic scribunt auctores," a description of the marriage of the Emperor Henry the Fifth to the daughter of Henry the First, King of England, derived from Matthew of

¹ See p. 9.

² See p. 14. This passage contains a reference to Capgrave's last

Commentary on the Books of the Kings.

³ "Genealogia ejus non tangitur apud auctores," p. 28.