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978-1-108-07145-1 - Richard III: His Life and Character Reviewed in the Light
of Recent Research

Clements R. Markham

Excerpt

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LIFE OF RICHARD III

PART I

CHAPTER I

BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD

THE castle of Fotheringhay¹ was the birthplace of our last Plantagenet king. This venerable pile stood on the banks of the river Nen, in Northamptonshire, amidst 'marvellous fair corn ground and pasture.' From its battlements there was an extensive view, bounded to the westward by the forest of Rockingham, while on the other side the abbey church of Peterborough and the woods of Milton intercepted the distant expanse of fen country. Originally built by bold Simon de St. Liz in the twelfth century, the castle had fallen into ruin when it reverted to the crown, and was granted by Edward III. to his son Edmund of Langley.

Edmund, who was created Duke of York by his nephew Richard II., rebuilt the castle and founded a college hard by. Fotheringhay was surrounded by a double moat with drawbridges, the river Nen serving as the outer moat on the south side, and the Mill Brook,

¹ 'Fodringeia' in Domesday. 'Fodering' is part of a forest separated from the rest, for producing hay.

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flowing between the castle yard and the little park, to the east. The walls were of stone, and the great gate in the north front was adorned with the arms of England, as differenced for Edmund of Langley, impaling the arms of Castille and Leon.¹ The keep, built in the shape of a fetterlock, was on a mount in the north-west angle of the castle; and below there was a great courtyard surrounded by stately buildings, a chapel, and 'very fair lodgings,' as Leland tells us. The great hall was seventy feet long, with a deep oriel window at one end.²

Here dwelt Edmund the first Duke of York, his son Edward the second Duke, who fell at Agincourt, and his grandson Richard, the third Duke. Edmund projected the foundation of a college near the parish church, to consist of a master, eight clerks, and thirteen choristers. He commenced the choir, while his son and grandson completed and richly endowed this religious house. The church was a fine specimen of the Perpendicular architecture of the time, and the cloisters had numerous windows filled with stained glass.

The third Duke of York resided at Fotheringhay during part of every year when he was in England,

¹ He married Isabella of Castille and Leon.

² Mary Queen of Scots was tried and beheaded in the great hall of Fotheringhay. But it is untrue that the castle was destroyed by James I. on that account. James granted it to Lord Mountjoy, and it was intact, though out of repair, when it was surveyed in 1625. It began to be dismantled soon after this survey; but the work of demolition was very gradual. The college buildings had been desecrated and destroyed by John Dudley, Duke of Northumberland, to whom they were granted by the government of Edward VI. The last remains of the castle were demolished in the middle of the last century. See *Historic Notices in reference to Fotheringhay*, by the Rev. H. K. Bonney (Oundle, 1821).

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BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD

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with his beautiful wife the Lady Cicely Nevill, the 'Rose of Raby,' and their troop of fair children. But he also held vast estates elsewhere. In Yorkshire the castles of Sandal and Conisborough were part of his paternal inheritance. On the Welsh borders he had succeeded to all the possessions of the Mortimers, including Ludlow and Wigmore. For his mother was the heiress of Edmund Mortimer, Earl of March, and also of Lionel Duke of Clarence, the second surviving son of King Edward III. Baynard's Castle, in the City of London, was the Duke's town house.

The 'Rose of Raby' bore her husband twelve children, and they came of a right noble English stock. In their veins flowed the blood of Plantagenet and Holland, Mortimer and FitzAlan, Nevill and Percy, Clifford and Audley. Five of these fair branches died in infancy. Ann, the eldest of those who survived early childhood, was born at Fotheringhay in 1439. The three next, Edward, Edmund and Elizabeth, first saw the light at Rouen, when their father was making a last gallant stand for English dominion in France, from 1442 to 1444. Margaret was born at Fotheringhay. The Duke and Duchess were ruling in Ireland when George was born at Dublin Castle. The three last births were at Fotheringhay, but of these only Richard, the eleventh child, survived infancy.

Richard Plantagenet was born at Fotheringhay Castle on October 2, 1452. He probably passed the first five years of his life there with George and Margaret. The elder sisters, Anne and Elizabeth, were married to 'Lancastrian' noblemen, the Dukes of Exeter and Suffolk, when Richard was still in infancy. His elder brothers, Edward Earl of March and Edmund Earl of Rutland, were separated from him by an interval

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of ten years, and lived with their tutor Richard Croft at Ludlow or Wigmore. So that Richard's childhood must have been passed with his brother George and his sister Margaret, the future Duchess of Burgundy. But both were a few years older than little Richard.

We obtain a glimpse of the home life of the two elder boys, Edward and Edmund, from a letter to their father which has been preserved.¹

‘Right high and right mighty prince, our full redoubted and right noble lord and father.

‘As lowly with all our hearts as we, your true and natural sons can or may, we recommend us unto your noble grace, humbly beseeching your noble and worthy fatherhood daily to give us your hearty blessing; through which we trust much the rather to increase and grow to virtue, and to speed the better in all matters and things that we shall use, occupy, and exercise.

‘Right high and right mighty prince, our full redoubted lord and father—

‘We thank our blessed Lord, not only of your honourable conduct and good speed in all your matters and business, of your gracious prevail against the intent and malice of your evil willers, but also of the knowledge that it pleased your nobleness to let us now late have of the same by relation of Sir Walter Devereux Kt.²

¹ *MS. Cotton, Vesp.*, F. iii., fol. 9. Printed in the first series of Ellis's original letters, i. 9, letter v.

² This Sir Walter Devereux, son of Walter Chancellor of Ireland 1449, when the Duke of York was Lord Deputy, was born in 1432. He married Anne, heiress of Lord Ferrers of Chartley, and was summoned to Parliament by that title *jure uxoris*. Sir Walter Devereux, Lord Ferrers of Chartley, fell gloriously at Bosworth, fighting for his King, Richard III., the younger brother of his two young friends

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and John Milwater Esq.,¹ and John at Nokes, yeoman of your honourable chamber. Also we thank your noble and good fatherhood for our green gowns now late sent unto us to our great comfort, beseeching your good lordship to remember our porteous,² and that we might have some fine bonnets sent unto us by the next sure messenger, for necessity so requireth. Over this, right noble lord and father, please it your highness to wit that we have charged your servant, William Smyth, bearer of these, for to declare unto your nobility certain things on our behalf, namely concerning and touching the odious rule and demeaning of Richard Croft and of his brother. Wherefore we beseech your gracious lordship and full noble fatherhood to hear him in exposition of the same, and to his relation to give full faith and credence. Right high and right mighty prince, our full redoubted and right noble lord and father, we beseech Almighty Jesus give you as good life and long, with as much continual perfect prosperity as your princely heart can best desire. Written at your castle of Ludlow on Saturday in Easter week.

‘ your humble sons

‘ Edward (Earl of March)

‘ Edmund (Earl of Rutland).’

The boys evidently did not like their tutor, declaring him to be tyrannical and disagreeable.³

Edward and Edmund. He was ancestor of the Devereux, Earls of Essex.

¹ Afterwards esquire to Richard Duke of Gloucester. He fell at the battle of Barnet, fighting by his young master's side.

² Breviary.

³ Richard Croft of Croft Castle, in Herefordshire, is the odious ruler mentioned by the young princes. He was faithful to King Edward during the Tewkesbury campaign; but the boys had some insight into

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CHILDREN OF RICHARD, DUKE OF YORK

1. Anne. Born at Fotheringhay, August 11, 1439. (Duchess of Exeter.)
2. Henry. Born at Hatfield, February 10, 1441. (Died in infancy.)
3. Edward. Born at Rouen,¹ April 28, 1442. (Earl of March. King.)
4. Edmund. Born at Rouen, May 17, 1443. (Earl of Rutland.)
5. Elizabeth. Born at Rouen, April 22, 1444. (Duchess of Suffolk.)
6. Margaret. Born at Fotheringhay, May 3, 1446. (Duchess of Burgundy. Died 1503.)
7. William. Born at Fotheringhay, July 7, 1447. (Died young.)
8. John. Born at Neath, November 7, 1448. (Died in infancy.)
9. George. Born at Dublin, October 21, 1449. (Duke of Clarence.)
10. Thomas. Born at Fotheringhay, 1450. (Died in infancy.)
11. Richard. Born at Fotheringhay, October 2, 1452.² (Duke of Gloucester. King.)
12. Ursula. Born at Fotheringhay, July 20, 1455. (Died in infancy.)

W. WYRCESTER, *Annales*, 460–477.

Their father, the Duke of York, first Prince of the blood royal, was the most powerful and wealthy, as well as one of the ablest noblemen in the kingdom. He was moderate and prudent, and was unwillingly driven into resistance to the misgovernment of the corrupt faction which misused the powers they had seized, owing to the imbecility of Henry VI. His original object was not to assert his own undoubted title to the throne, but to obtain just and reasonable government by the removal of corrupt and incapable ministers. ‘After repeated experience of bad faith, and after

character. For Croft appears to have been a time-server. He got made Treasurer of the Household to Henry Tudor, and fought for him at Stoke. To please his new patron he appears to have told some story, disparaging to Edward IV., which, in a garbled form, appeared in Hall’s *Chronicle*.

¹ Edwardus quartus Rothomagi natus. *Rous*, p. 210.

² Rous says that Richard was born on the feast of the eleven thousand virgins, October 21. But this was really George’s birthday, in 1449.

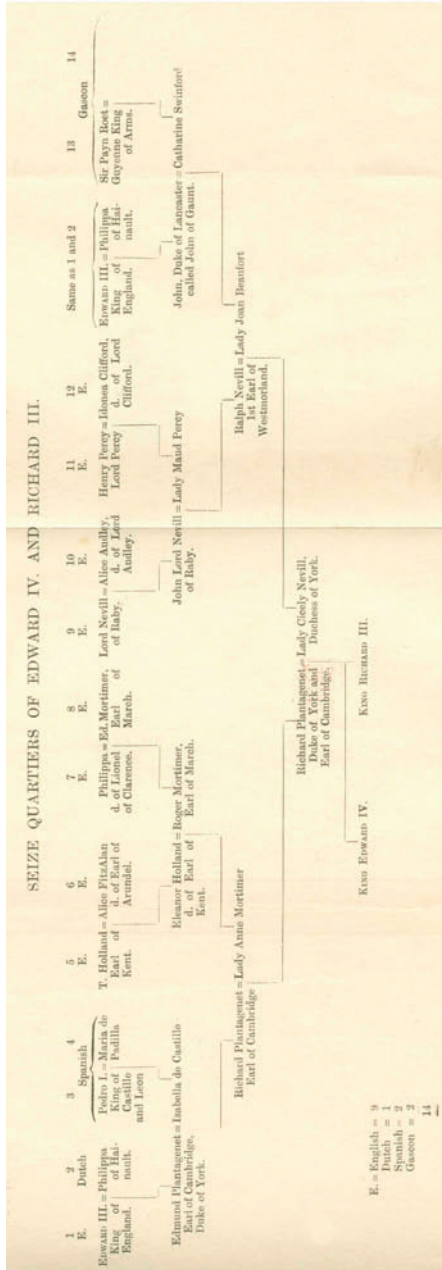
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fruitlessly endeavouring to bind Henry by pledges, the Duke was at length forced into advancing his own claim.¹

Disaster followed the first attempt of the Duke of York at open resistance. He was overpowered by the Lancastrian forces at Ludlow, in October 1459, and his followers were scattered. The Duke himself, with his son Edmund, fled to Ireland. His eldest son, Edward Earl of March, escaped to Calais with the Earl of Warwick. The Duchess of York, and her three young children, Margaret, George and Richard, were taken prisoners at Wigmore. They were sent to Tunbridge Castle in the custody of their mother's sister, the Duchess of Buckingham, who had married a Lancastrian husband.

Little Richard was only seven years of age when he became a prisoner of war. The detention was of short duration. His eldest brother landed in Kent and marched to London. Troops flocked to the standard of the gallant youth, and he advanced northwards against his enemies. The Duchess of York then escaped from Tunbridge, and found an asylum for her little children at the chambers of John Paston, in the Temple.²

Meanwhile Edward, Earl of March, won a great victory at Northampton, and Henry VI. became his prisoner. He returned to London, but the children had not been two days in John Paston's chambers before their mother was summoned to meet her

¹ Gairdner. The Duke's mother, Anne Mortimer, was granddaughter of Philippa Countess of March, the only child of Lionel Duke of Clarence, *second* son of King Edward III. Henry VI. was great-grandson of John Duke of Lancaster, *third* son of Edward III.

² *Paston Letters*, i. 525. Christopher Hansson to John Paston.

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husband at Hereford, who was returning from Ireland. The children were left with servants. Young Edward, however, while busily engaged in preparing for the defence of the city, found time to visit his little brothers and sister every day.¹

¹ 'And sythe y left here bothe the sunys and the dowztyr, and the Lord of Marche comyth every day to se them.'—*Paston Letters*.