

RICHARD III's 'CASTLE OF CARE'

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A long and very dilatory inquiry pursued over the last ten to fifteen years concerning the 'castle of care' has produced some points of interest and many unresolved questions. The first obvious question to be asked is on what basis do we attribute this phrase to Richard III used in reference to Nottingham Castle? Indeed, how far back can we trace this traditional attribution? We also have to decide on the meaning of 'care' in the fifteenth century.

Attention was drawn in the Ricardian Bulletin, December 1974, to the fact that the usual interpretation of 'care' as meaning 'grief' given in biographical works on Richard III is not the only interpretation to be found. Harry Gill in 'A Short History of Nottingham Castle' (1904) interpreted it as meaning 'regard'. Both are acceptable meanings in the Oxford English Dictionary and both possible in the 15th century. Reference to a fifteenth century English-Latin dictionary such as 'Promptorium Parvulorum' composed by Brother Geoffrey around 1440 and revised by Albert Way about fifty years later finds the following:—'*CARE. Tristicia, mesticia, dolor*' meaning grief and also '*CARE, of hert-besyne. Sollicitudo*'¹ meaning anxiety or solicitude. Regard being closely connected with the latter meaning.² Richard III could therefore have used the word in either sense and we are faced not so much with an etymological problem of what 'care' meant but with the far greater problem of ascertaining what Richard himself meant by using that particular word.

With these two alternative and equally acceptable translations of 'care' we have two themes to trace back to Richard's day to see if either associates itself infallibly with the King. The first may be called the 'regard' theme or the 'architectural' theme for it is found particularly associated with Richard III's building works at Nottingham Castle. The second is the 'grief' or 'literary' theme found most recently in P. M. Kendall's 'Richard III' where he suggests that as a consequence of the King learning of his only legitimate son's death while he and his Queen were staying at Nottingham Castle he called it the castle of his care.³

With the 'regard' or 'architectural' theme we can start in 1904 with Harry Gill's history.⁴ The whole theme is found again and very conveniently summarized by Caroline A. Halsted⁵ in 1844: 'Edward IV had built very largely on the north side of Nottingham Castle and Richard had continued his work, in particular a part which came to be known as Richard III's tower. The result had elicited profound admiration from the 16th century traveller, Leland. Halsted then goes on to point out that many events of great importance to Richard III happened in the castle including the news of the death of his son and the long wait for invasion in 1485 and concludes '*the nature of King Richard's feeling ... may be estimated by the appellation which he bestowed upon it; he called it the "Castle of Care"*'. Halsted is both stressing Richard's 'regard' for the castle and also pointing out the associations with 'grief'. She is also one of the few writers who quotes their source for the use of this phrase, which is William Hutton.

Hutton is firmly in the 'architectural' line of interpretation with no emotional overtones. 'Bosworth Field' originally came out in 1787 and was reissued with notes by J. Nichols in 1813 but nothing was added on this particular point. Hutton says that Richard 'was fond of Nottingham Castle, often resided there, had erected a turret on the eminence . . . and called it "the castle of care"' meaning simply that he bestowed care upon its building and regard upon the place.⁶

Going back further in the 18th century to find the phrase again we must turn to the local histories of Nottingham. The earliest, that of Charles Deering, published in 1751, quotes Leland and tells how the wicked Richard III built a tower there and 'a very little while before the fatal battle of Bosworth resided in it, called it the castle of care'.⁷ And then we come to a halt. Leland, the 16th century traveller and writer on the buildings of England in his Itineraries, merely described the building at Nottingham Castle ascribed to Richard III and does not appear to refer to the phrase 'castle of care'. Later histories of the area, even the great work of Thoroton, enlarged by John Throsby, add nothing at all to Deering. We may conclude then that the phrase was certainly being attributed to Richard III in the Nottingham area by at least the generation before Deering, that is circa 1720. We seem to be able to go no further, at least in printed works.

The 'literary' or 'grief' theme must now be pursued. This is not original to Kendall, for Sir Clements R. Markham repeated it and so did J. H. Jesse in his 'Memoirs of King Richard III' in 1861.⁸ Jesse quotes Hutton as his source ignoring the probably truer inspiration of Caroline Halsted. Kendall, Markham and Halsted are all writers in the fore-front of the campaign of vindication of Richard III. I have not been able to trace the definite 'grief' theme back further than Halsted and it may well have been she who 'created' it with her sympathetic portrayal of Richard III, the first writer in the Romantic era of the early 19th century, to take up Richard III. Earlier writers on Richard III such as George Buc and Sir Thomas More do not mention the castle of care, nor does the Croyland Chronicle. However, the 'grief' theme is not to be so lightly dismissed although it is not easily connected with local traditions in Nottingham.

There has been, surprisingly, no concern among writers to discuss the whole phrase, 'the Castle of Care'. There is one very famous example of its use in the late 14th century. This occurs in 'The Dream of Piers Plowman' by William Langland, Passus I, line 61. The dreamer, William Langland, has been greeted by a lady, later disclosed as Holy Church, who asks him if he sees the field full of folk taking no care for heaven. In the Prologue Langland has described his vision of a fine tower on a hill with a deep dale beneath it and a dungeon in it 'with depe dyches and derke and dredful of sight'. Before this lies a field full of the people of this world, of every possible condition and trade. Much afraid of the lady, Langland asks her the meaning of the scene. She answers that the tower on the hill holds Truth, the father whom all men should follow. She goes on to call the prison in the dale the castle of care. Whoever comes into that prison curses that he was born in body or soul. There dwells a creature called Wrong, the father of falsehood and the founder of falsehood. He incited Adam and Eve to ill, he counselled

Cain to kill his brother and he deluded Judas with the Jews' silver and Judas hanged himself afterwards on an elder. He prevents all love and he lies to all those who trust his treasure and only betrays them the sooner.

In relation to Richard we should think of the person who has got mentally into a deep dungeon and is there given over to grief. Undue grief might lead to despair of God's goodness, a very deadly sin. We may think that Richard had good cause to come near to despair after the death of his son and the succeeding disasters of his reign. However, did Richard know 'Piers Plowman'? It was not a courtly poem and not one immediately acceptable to those above the middle classes. Lydgate, Caxton and other writers commenting on their predecessors in the literary field failed to mention William Langland. Interest was concentrated on Chaucer, Gower and Lydgate himself as more 'modern' poets. Langland had avoided the fashionable gilded diction and used the dated alliterative style.⁹ So we may assume that Langland was certainly not a fashionable and well known author in Richard's day. But we know that the poem survives in over fifty manuscripts comparing well with Chaucer,¹⁰ so he must also have been reasonably popular and accessible to the 15th century reader, especially accessible to a man of means to whom the price of a book meant little. An article on the audience of *Piers Plowman*¹¹ has pointed to the popularity of the poem both as a religious tract and as a vernacular work greatly in demand by a class of readers who read only English with ease. The poem was didactic and both sophisticated in thought and excellent English verse, very different from Chaucer and Gower, but as appealing in its own right to the voracious appetite of the growing reading public of the 15th century. One must conclude that Richard III might well have read and known *Piers Plowman* well enough to quote from it.

We come back to the same unresolved questions. Did Richard III really use this phrase of the Castle of Nottingham? If he did, in what sense did he use it? Was he referring to his building works there and in particular to a tower on which he lavished extra attention and care? Did he merely express his regard for the Castle as a dwelling or was he deliberately associating it with his own grief? Or shall we come to the conclusion that he might have been very aware of the double meaning of 'care' and that he meant to express not only his regard for the castle but also the accident of fortune that made it the place where he received ill tidings? If he did, he chose a phrase of alliterative force, worthy of William Langland, the poet.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Camden Society (1843), I p. 62.
2. Oxford English Dictionary.
3. P. M. Kendall, *Richard III* (1955), p. 290.
4. I have been unable to consult a copy of this work but I have assumed since it is a History of Nottingham Castle that Mr. Gill was primarily concerned with the building that Richard III carried out there.
5. *Richard III*, II pp. 420-1.
6. W. Hutton, *The Battle of Bosworth Field* (1813), p. 40.
7. C. Deering, *Nottinghamia vetus et nova*... (1751), p. 171.
8. Clementis R. Markham: *Richard III* (1906), p. 148; J. H. Jesse: *Memoirs of King Richard III* (1894 ed.), p. 259.
9. J. W. H. Atkins: *English Literary Criticism: the mediaeval phase* (1943), pp. 177-8.
10. H. S. Bennett: *Chaucer and the 15th century* (1961), p. 119.
11. John Burrows: *The Audience of Piers Plowman*. *Anglia* 75 (1957).