

Further Comment on *Richard III* by Charles Ross

THE IMPORTANCE of a new biography of Richard III to those interested in this King justifies the inclusion of further comments on aspects of the book.

Lorraine Attreed:

Parliamentary theory and practice cause unfortunate problems for Professor Ross. He states (pp.31, 36) that Richard learned from Edward IV how to push acts through parliament to support claims untenable in a court of common law. Ross concludes that such achievements reveal a docile parliament willing to do the King's bidding, in this case to shower Richard with lands which should have been retained by others under the laws of inheritance. Ross does not question what such 'docility' did *for* parliament, in terms of acquisition of extraordinary powers which would both alter the concept of parliament's rôle, and serve as later precedents.

This interpretation is more appropriate, but still absent, in Ross' discussion of Richard's Parliament of 1484 (pp.185-6). He rejects Dunham and Wood's argument that Richard *was made* King by the authority of this Parliament (W. H. Dunham Jr. and C. T. Wood, *The Right to Rule in England: Depositions and the Kingdom's Authority, 1377-1485*, *American Historical Review*, 81, 1976, 738-61). Ross insists that the Three Estates of the Realm which elected Richard in June 1483 was an extra-parliamentary body. The full *Rotuli Parliamentorum* entry (Vol. 6, pp.240-2) records that the first Three Estates were identified with the Estates assembled in Parliament January 1484, and that the actions of June were to 'be of like effect, virtue, and force, as if the same things had been so said... in a full parliament and by authority of the same accepted and approved.' Once again, Ross sees the 1484 gathering as nothing more than 'a biddable assembly', acting to inhibit further displays of opposition to Richard's rule. The nature of 'the authority of parliament' is as important as why it was used: such a focus would have kept Ross from insisting wrongly that Dunham and Wood asserted that 1484 was 'the high-water mark of "constitutionalism" in the fifteenth century'. Their point is a more subtle and progressive one, that parliament was beginning to gather to itself powers which allowed it to speak with the authority not just of the King but of God and the realm. The

parliaments of Edward IV and Richard III pleased their sovereigns, as Ross has noticed, but they were at the same time gradually acquiring powers that would change the nature of kingship and accession (C. T. Wood, Celestine V, Boniface VIII, and the Authority of Parliament, *Journal of Medieval History* 8, 1982, forthcoming).

The chapter on the usurpation of 1483 has similar problems. In criticizing Wood's treatment of the subject (The Deposition of Edward V, *Traditio* 31, 1975, 247-86) Ross ignores most of Wood's points on the reality of the Hastings conspiracy. Polydore Vergil is a major, trustworthy source for Ross, who does not deal with him in his entirety. His observation that following Stony Stratford, Queen Elizabeth Woodville was in one part of London collecting forces while Hastings was in another doing the same, allows Ross to conclude that Hastings was still supporting Richard. Ignored by Ross, however, is Vergil's description of Hastings' fears for Edward V's continued survival, and Hastings' gathering with friends in St. Paul's to plan what to do. This may not be evidence of a conspiracy, but it ought to have been discussed at least to be dismissed.

Difficult also is the passage on the writs of *supersedeas* which cancelled Edward V's coronation and parliament. Ross does not take into account the slow bureaucratic process of composing and issuing the writs, a process which would have begun before Richard of York left sanctuary and thus before Gloucester could benefit from putting aside Edward V. Ross may want to depict Richard as clever and cruel, but he instead describes a man caught by events, responding instead of initiating; he is far closer to Wood's unflattering portrait that he recognizes. For Ross, Wood's article is a castigation of Richard 'for his failure to produce a more convincing claim to the throne (than the contradictory illegitimacy stories).' An historical slap on the wrist is not the point, but Richard's inability to think ahead *is*: the fallacy of *post hoc, ergo propter hoc* is a tempting one, even for historians of Ross' skill and stature.

Robert Hairsine:

Ross is repeatedly disapproving of P. M. Kendall's treatment. Typically, referring to Bosworth, 'Kendall's account of the battle remains an astonishing mixture of imagination, speculation and purple prose and his description of Richard's last moments seems to suggest that he was perched on the crupper of the King's horse'. It should be remembered that P. M. Kendall was responsible, with K. B. McFarlane, for the resurgence of interest in this period which has enabled Professor Ross' own works to be a commercial proposition for publication. Kendall's achievement was to combine research, reassessment and drama in a work which is both scholarly and readable, but he leaves us in no doubt as to when he is using imagination to fill in the gaps. As a professor of English literature he was, of course, well-trained to cross the boundary between popular and academic writing and it is regrettable that no one else has successfully followed this example.

Ross shows particular respect for Polydore Vergil. In note 15 page xxv he states that 'Polydore's references . . . to Richard's nervous habits of chewing his lower lip and plucking at his dagger *clearly show* that he had his information

from someone who knew Richard well' (my italics). Readers may like to consider whether this does not rather indicate Polydore's talent for creating a character with a few well-chosen words and does it not clearly show Professor Ross' unquestioning acceptance of gratuitous descriptive matter when it happens to fit his preconceived semi-traditional picture of his subject? Ross' faith in Polydore Vergil is particularly noticeable in his discussion of the list of the lords who accompanied Richard on the Progress of Summer 1483. He states: 'That Buckingham was with the King until they parted at Gloucester is stated by Vergil and More but is rejected by Kendall on the grounds that he is not included in the contemporary list of guests entertained at Magdalen College, Oxford. Kendall however was anxious to have Buckingham back in London so that he might murder the princes in the Tower.' Apart from the acid aside at Kendall, one can only marvel that Ross gives more credit to partisan historians writing thirty to forty years later, with the benefit of hindsight, than to a bald, contemporary, non-political, eye-witness account. In compiling a list of distinguished guests, the Registrar of Magdalen College would hardly have overlooked the presence of the Duke of Buckingham; the second most powerful man in the land! This is a particularly blatant example of the unbalanced weighting given to sources that support the author's preconceptions. In other cases the treatment is more subtle and the evidence that does not fit is simply left out. For example, while discussing Jane Shore in the context of Richard's public attitudes to morality, Ross reproduces only that part of Richard's letter to Russell disapproving of Thomas Lynom's projected marriage with Mistress Shore. He omits the King's qualification that: 'if ye find him utter set for to marry her . . . we be content, the time of marriage being deferred to our coming next to London . . .'

On the fascinating questions of the authorship and dating of the Croyland Chronicle, he dismisses without adequate discussion J. G. Edwards' theory regarding the probability of the rearrangement of folios in the original manuscript (*BIHR* 39 1966, pp.117-129). He notes that the dating phrase used in the Chronicle is used in other works by the most likely author, Bishop Russell, but fails to acknowledge that this point was noted in this Journal as long ago as 1976 (No. 54, pp.30-1).

Ross appears anxious to maximise Richard's involvement in the fall of Clarence. Without any authority cited directly, he states: 'He had been present at the council meetings in 1477 at which the assault upon Clarence had obviously been decided.' From a later reference we may infer that Ross deduces Richard's presence at Council meetings from the evidence of his name as a witness to royal charters. It would help the case if document references and dates were given but it hardly answers the question of whether Richard supported the impeachment. This is a line of enquiry that should be pursued. Ross goes on to suggest that Richard 'lent his aid to the systematic packing of the parliament of 1478 (at least five of his retainers being members of the house).' It would be surprising indeed if a lot more than five retainers of a royal duke did not appear in a fifteenth century parliament. Ross states of Richard that 'any overt breach between himself and the Woodvilles seems to belong to the last five years of Edward's reign and was *certainly* not inspired by any difference of opinion arising from Clarence's death.' How can a writer, ostensibly trained to weigh carefully evidence and probabilities, allow himself to use words like 'certain' about such an uncertain matter?

Isolde Wigram:

On the subject of the 1483 rebellion, Professor Ross thinks that Elizabeth Woodville in Sanctuary was well able to find out if her sons were dead or not, but if they were being withdrawn into the inner apartments of the Tower, how would this be possible? He further writes that the rebels, many of them with close connections with Edward IV's court 'would not have been duped into supporting Henry's claim unless they had established that Edward V was already dead' and that they 'were unlikely to act on mere rumour'. This scenario is almost beyond belief. Are we to imagine assemblies of men from all the southern counties, who had risen to rescue the princes from the Tower, converging on London to 'establish' that Edward V was already dead—or did they send delegates? In admitting that 'we cannot wholly discount the notion that, once determined on rebellion, Buckingham himself had helped to spread the rumour', Professor Ross fails to take account of Vergil's telling reference to Lady Margaret, Henry Tudor's mother (that lady so delightfully described by Buck as 'of a politic and contriving bosom') who, when she heard the rumour of the death of the princes '*began to hope well of hir soones [son's] fortune, supposing that that dede wold without dout proove for the profyt of the commonwelth*' (Polydore Vergil, Camden Society 1844, p.195). In the face of that, can he really maintain that Richard had the strongest motive for removing the boys? It would have suited his enemies very well, if they could have gained access to the princes, to remove them and let Richard bear the blame. Richard Firth Green's article (*EHR* 380, 1981) mentions that in 1483 within the mayoral year of Edmund Shaa, the princes 'wer put to deyth in the Towur of London be the vise of the Duke of Buckingham'. This rumour connecting Buckingham with the murder of the boys ties up with similar references in Commines and the Dutch *Divisie Chronicle* referred to by Audrey Williamson in her *The Mystery of the Princes*.

On several occasions Professor Ross fails to set out the full story because favourable to Richard. The Jane Shore letter has been mentioned above but Ricardians also know that when Richard lodged at Magdalen College on his visit to Oxford, Bishop Wayneflete the founder wrote *vivat Rex in Aeternam* in the College register. This Ross omits in favour of the supposition that Richard did not understand the learned disputations that he heard. There is no mention of Caxton's laudatory dedication of *The Order of Chivalry* to Richard, nor of Carmeliano's eulogy, even if like Rous he changed his tune after Richard's death; or the flattering reference by the Scottish ambassador Quitlaw. There are not so many things written in Richard's favour that any can be left out if a balanced picture is to be presented, but Professor Ross omits most of them. Even Bishop Langton's panegyric is dismissed as the euphoric account of a supporter on the way up, and he is sceptical about Convocation's reference to Richard's 'noble and blessed disposition'.

Predictably therefore he is less than enthusiastic about Richard's legislation, and considers 'by implication if not by intent, Kendall was right in admitting some degree of political calculation in the legislation of Richard's parliament.' Perhaps Professor Ross will explain how legislation can or should be framed *without* political calculation? He invites the reader to judge for himself whether

Richard was 'by nature or perforce a well-intentioned King'. This is easily answered. Mancini wrote that Richard as Duke of Gloucester 'set out to acquire the loyalty of his people through favours and justice' (Mancini p.63) and Professor Ross himself stresses the mutual affection and loyalty existing between Richard and his Northern supporters. On the other hand Henry VII, who certainly needed support quite as much as Richard, was hardly regarded by his subjects as a well-intentioned King, and the mind boggles at the thought of Henry ever saying that he would rather have his subjects' hearts than their money. It is impossible to act consistently against one's own nature.

Professor Ross concludes that any 'contrariety of character' (as Hutton termed it) of Richard III stems not from what we know about him but from what we do not know. Dr. Kalckhoff, in his recent biography of Richard, on the other hand, thinks '*Niemand wird plötzlich zum Schurken*' or *Nemo repente turpissimus*—No one suddenly becomes a villain, and until his brother's death no blame could be attached to Richard, though he agrees with Professor Ross that Richard may well have taken note of the example set by both Warwick and Edward IV in the realm of power politics. However he concludes, from the strong feelings aroused by the controversy, that the English appear to need their 'wicked King' for what he calls '*psychische Hygiene*'—a scapegoat (in the true Biblical sense) to bear the guilt of centuries. It might be à propos to ponder Churchill's saying: 'The venom of a man's enemies is the measure of his strength'.

James Petre:

The book is a good deal shorter than we no doubt anticipated, and in that, it inevitably deals rather too concisely with some aspects of Richard's life which are both important and interesting. One of the book's great strengths however, lies in the author's handling of Richard's 'Northern Connection'. If any serious historian ever doubted the indispensable value of a good knowledge of the genealogy of his period, chapter three, 'The Heir of Nevill:—Richard Duke of Gloucester and the North of England' will straighten him out. Complemented by family trees, the chapter shows the links, forged by marriage, between the familiar northern magnate names of Scrope of Bolton, Scrope of Masham, Greystoke, Dacre of Gilsland and FitzHugh. Allied to these families, again through marriage, and also prominent in support of Richard, were two lords from south of Trent: Lovell and Zouche. Scarcely less valuable a prop of the 'Connection' was the northern gentry—the Conyers, Metcalfes, Savilles and others from Yorkshire, Harrington from Lancashire, Brackenbury from Durham, Huddleston, Musgrave and Ratcliffe from the north-west to name but a few. All in all, one might be pardoned for thinking that Richard's affinity included anybody who was worth knowing in the North. Of course this is not quite true, and indeed Ross makes no claim that it was. Nonetheless it is clear that as Ross says (p.44), 'Richard III is unique among medieval English kings in the extent of his connection with the north of England.'

Ross is emphatic that Richard's Northern Connection dominated much of what occurred between April 1483 and August 1485. It was his Northerners who helped him appropriate the Crown, and thereafter he steadily filled a large number of important appointments with men who had served him as duke. This

was no doubt resented in the capital which was not used to such an influx of Northerners, and the rebellion of 1483 may have been in part an expression of this (p.111). If so, the rebellion had precisely the opposite of the desired effect, for in the wake of its suppression, Richard felt obliged to intrude his Northerners into the control of the South even more than before. The estates of rebels and the vacated offices of the administration of the southern counties passed largely into northern hands which probably 'cost King Richard the allegiance of the southern and western gentry . . . for none of them thought fit to fight for Richard against Henry Tudor. Indeed, all their leaders were on the other side' (pp.123-124).

Of course there is nothing new about the North-South antithesis which had an important influence on the events of Richard's reign. It has been discussed elsewhere—in *The Ricardian* for instance (see A. J. Pollard, North, South and Richard III, No. 74, pp.384-389); Anne F. Sutton, Research Notes and Queries, No. 76, p.27) but in my view at least, it cannot be stressed enough. Ross has hit the nail on the head with his quotation from Croyland (p.123) and more piercingly with his own words (p.59) where he says, 'It is important to realize that in southern England men from the north were still regarded with fear and mistrust, as wild, warlike, lawless and licentious.' Reading this, one cannot help but be reminded of the words of George Orwell in a splendid passage in *The Road to Wigan Pier* where he writes 'The Southerner goes north . . . with the vague inferiority complex of a civilized man venturing among savages, while the Yorkshireman, like the Scotsman, comes to London in the spirit of a barbarian out for loot.' The fact that, as Orwell says, the antithesis is still manifest in our own day suggests what a force it must have had in more parochial times. In perceiving this, Prof. Ross, whom we note was brought up in Yorkshire and then migrated south, is to be applauded.

William Hampton:

Professor Ross examines Richard's northern 'plantation', the replacement of a 'native ruling elite by his northern, "foreign" retainers'. On page 120 he writes: 'The northerners began to move into the southern counties, especially into the south-west, whence a higher proportion of rebels had fled, immediately after the rebellion'. He then offers as examples the names of northerners appointed, in November 1483, to replace local officials. Most of these names do not, in fact, serve to prove his point.

William Mauleverer, made escheator in Kent, was married—probably by the last year of Edward IV's reign—to Joan (either a Calthorp or a Langley), widow of Thomas Peyton. She brought him control of properties in Kent, Suffolk and elsewhere. William remained in the south, and he died, and was buried, at Clerkenwell in 1498 (*Cal. Inq. p.m. H VII*, I Nos. 362, 447, 448, 450).

Halnath Mauleverer, made Sheriff of Devon, held lands in Cornwall from at least as early as 1466 (*Harleian Society* 7, p.298, *Cal. Ancient Deeds* IV, A II 403). His wife, Joan (co-heiress of Thomas Carminow), was the widow of Sir Thomas Carew, baron of Carew (who died in 1443). Halnath held *jure uxoris* lands in Cornwall, Devon and Dorset (*ibid.*, Nos. 674, 761, 1201). The husband of Joan's sister, Sir Hugh Courtenay, was executed after the battle of Tewkesbury. Two of his sons rebelled in 1483, one being created Earl of Devon

after Bosworth. Halnath was appointed Sheriff of Cornwall on 6 November 1470—a Readeption appointment. He was first made Sheriff of Devon on 6 November 1479, his second appointment as Sheriff of Devon being that of November 1483.

Thomas Huddleston should surely be his elder brother, John, for (as Professor Ross has shown in *The Ricardian*, No. 55, pp.2-4) Thomas was dead by 1477. John Huddleston's family was one close to (indeed through his marriage of his brother, Richard, related to) Richard of Gloucester. In 1478, he was made, for life, constable of Sudeley Castle, Gloucestershire, and master of the game, steward and receiver of that lordship (*CPR 1476-85*, p.93). He subsequently became escheator of Southampton (Hampshire) and Wiltshire (in November 1480) and of Gloucestershire (in November 1481).

John Musgrave was certainly a newcomer (Sheriff of Wiltshire, November 1484), but that county had often been served by officials of northern birth or descent.

Sir Thomas Fulford—'another Yorkshireman'—was in fact from Fulford, in Devon, and he possessed properties in other south-western counties. His father, Sir Baldwin, had been executed after Towton. The man he replaced as sheriff of Somerset and Dorset, in 1484, Edward Redmayne, was indeed a newcomer.

Sir Thomas Broughton did not, *pace* Ross, become sheriff of Cornwall in 1484. *The Calendar of Fine Rolls 1471-85* correctly names Sir William Houghton as sheriff (see also *CPR 1476-85*, p.490). No northerner, but from Worcestershire, Houghton married a Cornish heiress, sister of Sir John Colshill (d. 1484). Examination of the motives of rebels, such as Robert Willoughby, with an interest in the Colshill/Stafford earl of Devon inheritance can not, unfortunately, be made in this short notice.

None of these men can justly be described, as by Professor Ross, as strangers (Redmayne and Musgrave excepted) 'intended from the first to play a dominant rôle' (in the landed society of those shires).

On at least thirty-five occasions during the reign of Edward IV (including the Readeption) the counties of Cornwall, Devon, Somerset and Dorset, and Wiltshire and Southampton, 'endured' sheriffs and escheators (and one may add members of parliament and justices of the peace) of 'foreign', mainly northern, birth or descent. Among these occurs the name of the Yorkshireman, Sir Roger Tocotes, one of the rebels attainted in 1484.

On page 121 Professor Ross appears to include John Lord Zouch among these northerners. Zouch was married to a Dynham, and was an important landowner in Somerset. Most of his life (certainly after Bosworth) was spent in that county, and there he died, at Stavordale Priory (where his chantry chapel remains), in 1526.

How Richard III increasingly placed the rule of the dissident southern counties into the hands of trusted northern supporters has been thoroughly examined by Dr. A. J. Pollard (*Journal of Medieval History* 3, 1977, pp.161-2), who also reminds us that not all of the southern gentry opposed the king. The Croyland Chronicler, however, badly (and absurdly) overstates his case when he condemns the King for placing northerners 'in every spot throughout his dominions'. They were not, surely, 'planted' north of the Trent.