

If he made mistakes, they were mistakes of the head, not of the heart

# The Memoirs of Richard III

Louis Baldwin

*A word of explanation. Amid some controversy, historians have generally presented King Richard III of England as a thoroughly evil man who clawed his way to power over the corpses of his many victims and who was killed finally in the Battle of Bosworth Field in 1485. These recently discovered memoirs reveal, however, that the crowned and ironclad man who died in that famous battle was really a loyal double on special assignment. Richard himself lived, not to fight another day, but to write his memoirs during his final years of secluded retirement in Cornwall, on the west coast.*

*The memoirs also make it perfectly clear that Richard was a man of exalted integrity, unimpeachable intentions, and sterling virtues, a hero whose reputation was irreparably blackened by malevolent and irresponsible chroniclers.*

*The brief but significant excerpts that follow are presented essentially unaltered, although the language has been modernized for easier reading and some of the gamier expletives have been deleted.*

I was born in one of my father's castles in October, 1452. Contrary to unfriendly rumors that I emerged from the womb scarce half made up, I was actually a handsome little fellow, blessed with the stunning good looks that I've managed to keep throughout my life by dint of clean living. Although my left arm has always been a bit shorter and weaker than my right, the report that I was deformed is just another of the many [expletive deleted] canards spread by unscrupulous scribblers.

I saw very little of my father, who was a busy and important man. As Richard Plantagenet, Duke of York, he had several castles to defend and otherwise attend to, and he was incessantly up to his visor in the bloody struggle for power between the House of York and the House of Lancaster. In the 1450's—when the addled incompetence of King Henry VI, a Lancastrian, grew

too obvious to be ignored—Parliament in its wisdom appointed my father Lord Protector of the realm and declared him heir to the crown. But King Henry's wolverine of a wife, Margaret of Anjou, took sharp exception to this disinheritance of their young son Edward, the Prince of Wales. After gathering up an army the way another woman might gather up a skirt, she defeated my father in the Battle of Wakefield in December, 1460. He was captured and executed on the spot, and the venomous bitch arranged to have his head, wreathed with a paper crown, displayed on a pole at the gates of the town of York.

At the time, being a tender lad only nine years old, I was living with my dear mother in one of the family castles near London. My dear mother, an admirable woman of persistent and irrepressible sanctity, had fulfilled her wifely duties chiefly by having twelve children, of whom I was the eleventh. When not giving birth, she spent most of her time inexhaustibly attending mass, praying, and reading holy books. It was from her, of course, that I inherited my own deeply religious nature.

Of my seven brothers, four died in childhood, and Edmund died fighting at Wakefield. Only three of us survived our father: Edward, Earl of Marche; George, Duke of Clarence; and I, Richard, Duke of Gloucester. Edward, the oldest, was a fine fellow, and I was always his faithful friend and supporter. George, unfortunately, was to prove less reliable.

Edward, though only nineteen, was now head of the family, charged by custom with confounding its [expletive deleted] enemies and retrieving its fortunes. As for George and me, my dear mother arranged with the Earl of Warwick, a relative who was then Lord High Admiral, to have us shipped off hurriedly to Holland with our surviving sister (inaptly named Margaret). There we continued with our education, while mother stayed behind in London and anxiously awaited word from Edward, who was on a recruiting mission in the west.

Queen Margaret's army soon was advancing on London from the north, pillaging and plundering and generally making itself unpopular with the people. But the

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large force that Edward had recruited had grown so mightily, as he raced toward London, that Margaret turned tail and discreetly retreated north into friendlier country. She may have thought she was setting a trap, but Edward, instead of pursuing her, marched into London, where he was acclaimed king.

And so it was that George and I were brought back from Holland to rejoin Edward and our dear mother, and to be formally given the titles of Clarence and Gloucester, together with associated properties and perks. It was the beginning of a glorious period, since Edward's reign, except for a brief interruption, was to last for twenty years.

But not for twenty untroubled years. That [expletive deleted] Margaret, with help from France, managed to keep the pot boiling for quite a while. She kept busy raising armies and losing them in battle to Warwick, while Halfwit Henry was bundled about from castle to castle to prevent his capture. In 1464, however, his luck ran out. A large party of Yorkists caught him between castles and brought him to my brother, King Edward, who unceremoniously clapped him into the Tower of London. Margaret thereupon decided to take a vacation in France with her ex-Prince of Wales.

The repossession of Henry now allowed Edward to launch a strong campaign against the dispirited Lancastrians, exterminating large numbers of them in the national interest. Despite the continued survival of Henry and his son as claimants to the throne, we Yorkists seemed pretty comfortably settled in the catbird seat.

Yet in that same year, 1464, brother Edward sowed seeds of future trouble by idiotically falling in love with a Lancastrian widow named Elizabeth Woodville. By marrying her, he not only gave the house of Lancaster new access to the political plum tree, but he also alienated many powerful Yorkist families with marriageable daughters—including that of the mighty Earl of Warwick, who had two unmarried daughters with bottoms itching for a throne to sit on. The marriage also angered brother George, whose bottom was first in line for the throne so long as King Edward had no sons. As for me, next in line after George, I had no great interest in the throne for my own sake, though of course I was eager to perform any public service.

Over the next couple of years Lancastrians, merely for the price of swearing their doubtful allegiance to Edward, were gathering political plums by the bushel. In addition Queen Elizabeth had five unmarried sisters, for whom she arranged marriages with young Yorkist noblemen, thus further infuriating loyal Yorkist parents of nubile hopefuls—especially Warwick.

Indeed, the situation had given old Warwick chronic apoplexy, but he did achieve a measure of revenge by marrying off one of his daughters to brother George, who was still first in line for the throne because Edward and Elizabeth had failed as yet to produce a son. The King and Queen, alarmed by the political power that Warwick would gain from the marriage, tried every means short of castration to prevent it, but in vain.

Soon after the wedding a rebellion broke out in the north, and King Edward, in an effort to quell it, got himself into a predicament from which Warwick and George had to rescue him. After this amiable gesture, the three of them returned to London and signed treaties of reconciliation and refurbished friendship.

It was now the fall of 1469—I was seventeen and beginning to play a minor role—and the newfound amity lasted all of six months, into the spring of 1470. In the spring many a young man's fancy turns to insurrection, and as a result King Edward had a lot of quelling to do. In the process he collected an army big enough to take on Warwick and George and eventually to drive them to the port of Dartmouth. From there the Warwick party, on the assumption that amity had run its course, crossed over to the Continent for a little rehabilitation.

Amid all this bustle George had seemed rather preoccupied, and now—indeed on board ship before they reached the French coast—his wife gave birth to a son, thus adding another obstacle between me and the throne. Personally, I couldn't have cared less, but I did feel a deep concern for our great country.

In France the Earl of Warwick managed to convince Queen [expletive deleted] Margaret that he was now King Edward's implacable enemy, and even to beguile her into the marriage of his remaining single daughter to her treasured prince. Her price for this, an all-out effort on his part to restore Harebrained Henry to the throne, was one that he was more than willing to pay.

He paid the price, and more. He returned to England with a large force, drove Edward and me across the channel, and freed the befuddled Henry. But this Lancastrian triumph was a brief one, ending when Edward and I returned, defeated Warwick at Coventry, dispatched him without ceremony, were reconciled with George, and then defeated the bitch Margaret at Tewkesbury, capturing her and her prince. Edward, George, and I met with the two of them soon thereafter, and the Prince behaved so impudently that George and I stabbed him to death—a perfectly legal operation, since the King desired it. On our return to London we stowed the [expletive deleted] Margaret in the Tower. Finally, to rid our beloved country of the Lancastrian scourge once and for all, I gave Henry the bare-bodkin treatment in a spirit of selfless patriotism. Thus was the winter of our Yorkist discontent made glorious summer.

It was now 1471. At the age of nineteen I was appointed Lord High Admiral.

By now, 1483, brother Edward had proved a disappointment as king. Affairs of state languished while he spent sportive hours in his bedchamber with that [expletive deleted] Jane Shore. Despite this frequent exercise, he was not a well man. In fact, he often seemed at death's door, and this deeply troubled me. If he died, the one person who could save England from chaos, and maintain law and order, would be three steps removed from the throne. Young Prince

Edward, my twelve-year-old nephew, was first in line; then his even younger brother; then George; and then me. My duty, however distasteful, was perfectly clear.

George first. I reluctantly reminded the King of George's unreliability in the past and of a necromancer's recent warning that Edward's line would be extinguished by a person whose name began with G. This was enough for Edward, who interrupted his Shore leave long enough to order George into the Tower. I hired a couple of stout fellows for a covert operation in which this threat to our beloved country would be eliminated discreetly, but discretion was not their bag. Besides stabbing him, they drowned him noisily in a barrel of wine. I was shocked by this outcome, being a very moderate drinker myself.

**W**hen the news of George's death reached Edward, he promptly died of remorse, complicated perhaps by overexertion. His son Edward thus became king, with me fortunately as Lord Protector. My friend the Duke of Buckingham arranged to have young Edward and his brother brought to London, and we put them up comfortably in the Tower—not as prisoners, of course, but as honored guests. Although the little bastards stood in the way of England and her salvation, one had to observe the amenities.

I was now in an awkward position. People were clamoring for me to take the throne, yet I could not show any of my natural eagerness for selfless public service, lest it be mistaken for unseemly ambition. Buckingham helped me out of this predicament by getting some Londoners to press the crown on me in a public meeting, thus allowing me to accept the burden with becoming modesty.

**E**ven some weeks after the coronation my title to the crown remained clouded because of those presumptuous brats in the Tower. In the national interest, my course was clear. This time I enlisted a man with a greater talent for discretion, a real patriot by the name of Tyrrel. He managed to snuff them out quite neatly, with pillows, and to arrange a quiet burial, so that the news of their disappearance spread slowly, without raising much alarm. It was an agonizing decision for me, of course, one that brought me to my knees with tears in my eyes. But I was comforted by the realization that the national security demanded it, and by my knowledge that the king can do no wrong.

**B**y now, two years after my coronation, things were still not going well, not well at all. Although my enemies list had been pruned by several judicious beheadings, it grew longer each passing day with new additions. I had been blocked in my effort to marry the daughter of Edward and Elizabeth (a move designed to heal divisions and bring the country together), even though my wife, Anne, had conveniently died, with only a little dietary encouragement. My friend



Buckingham, whose greed I had failed to satisfy, had turned his coat in support of the Earl of Richmond, my latest rival for the throne. I had put a price on Buckingham's head to protect national security, but that was small comfort. And Richmond reportedly was gathering an overwhelming force on the Continent, preparing to invade England.

**N**ow that the battle is over, with my look-alike dead and Richmond on the throne, I have written these lines to set the record straight. No mere subject can appreciate why a king must do some of the things he does for the good of the country. If I made mistakes, they were mistakes of the head, not of the heart—which was always in the right place. All that I did, I did for God and country. Whoever says otherwise is a [expletive deleted] liar.