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Short Observation on the Remarks of the Rev. Mr. Masters

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SHORT
OBSERVATIONS

ON

The Remarks of the Rev. Mr. Masters,

ON

The HISTORIC DOUBTS,

Published in the second Volume of the ARCHÆOLOGIA.

A NEW knight having entered the lists in the controverly concerning Richard III. I shall bestow a few words on his notes, though with much circumspection; for, although he professes to condemn me, he has contributed so much to the discomfit of my adversaries, that I cannot but be obliged to him for having furnished me with new weapons, which though he brought into the field against me, he has, by mistake, directed against them. Why he opposes me, though thinking as I do, I cannot tell; perhaps he can. It shall be my business notwithstanding to set him right, and to show him that his arguments, as far as they have any meaning, support mine, and tend to confirm my doubts.

He says I assert facts on the slightest evidence against the common current of almost all the cotemporary historians.

Answer. There were but two cotemporary historians, Fabian, and the author of the Chronicle of Croyland. I have quoted the first to show that Richard did not murder Edward prince of Wales, son of Henry VI. and to

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the second I have appealed for the same cause and many other facts. I have laid the same stress on the continuator of the Chronicle as Mr. Masters does (vide p. 16 of Hist. Doubts). Is this the proof of my rejecting his authority?

Fabian says prince Edward was slain by the king's servants—Mr. Masters concludes *servants* mean *great men*; but they must mean the king's brothers too, or Richard, even from Fabian's words, cannot be included in the charge. Mr. Masters, to prove *servants* mean what the term cannot mean, *the king's own brothers*, produces the phrase I had quoted from the Chronicle, *ultricius quorundam manibus*; and in that very phrase too finds the *quorundam* to mean *the king's brothers*: that is, he finds that the lowest term implies the highest. Was I in the wrong to say that he is on my side without knowing it? Or will he be so good as to quote a passage in any tolerable author, in which such a term as *somebody* or *other* is used to signify the first men in a nation? If an historian, describing the death of Hotspur at the battle of Shrewsbury, had said, *he was slain by one knows not whom*, should we have ever guessed that he was killed by Henry prince of Wales?

As in the next article, the murder of Henry VI, Mr. Masters seems not to know his own opinion, I shall pass it over without a remark.

On the murder of Clarence he is equally uncertain. But he thinks my argument drawn from Edward's complaint of no man's interceding for Clarence, confutes the authorities I have quoted for Richard's openly resisting Clarence's death. If intercession and open resistance are synonymous terms, I own I have argued ill: if they are not, Mr. Masters does not argue very well.

But I have called in question the authority of sir Thomas More's History. True, I have; and Rastell's Chronicle, written many years after by sir Thomas More's own brother-in-law, shows that I had some reason for so doing. If sir Thomas's account received from archbishop Morton was authentic, could it be doubtful so many years afterwards? Is it credible that Rastell should never have seen sir Thomas's History? And if it was genuine, could Rastell, brother and printer to its author, give two other different accounts of the deaths of Edward V. and his brother? Were More and Rastell so nearly allied and so intimate, and yet did neither communicate his work to the other?

When Raftell wrote his Chronicle, would not fir Thomas have asked, why he reported vague, absurd and improbable tales of their deaths, when he himself had given the only certain account from the best authority? When Raftell did not believe the narrative of his own brother-in-law, am I so very culpable for questioning it? If Mr. Masters was good at reconciling contradictions, I would entreat him to solve these. Till he has, I must beg leave to rank him on my side; as he must either doubt with me, or believe contradictions.

I am again warranted to claim this gentleman as the supporter of my opinion, by his owning in p. 204 that the parliament-roll (which I have quoted, but, with leave, never plumed myself on having discovered) asserts the pre-contract of Edward IV. with the lady Eleanor Butler. But Mr. Masters goes much farther; and, to the confusion of our antagonists, shows that she probably broke her heart on the king's marriage. I should not have been bold enough to go so far, but am obliged to him for taking that task on himself. Why he says a few lines higher, that it might as well have been Lucy as Butler, when he has proved it was Butler, I cannot conceive. But as he assists me with new proofs, I will not quarrel with him for a disposition to contradict me.

I am sorry his arguments against me are weaker than the facts he furnishes me with—but what can I say to such reasoning as this? *If lady Eleanor Butler was dead, as she certainly was, long before the birth of Edward V. this surely could not be a proper foundation of his illegitimacy,* p. 205. I will not dwell on the context of this argument, which is, that if she was not dead when Edward V. was born; it would have been a foundation for bastardizing him; which implies that she had been married to Edward IV.—But can a divine really know so little of the canon law, as to think that the death of a lawful wife legitimates ipso facto the issue of children born of an illegal wife? If lady Eleanor Butler was Edward's lawful wife, lady Gray could not become his lawful wife by a marriage performed during lady Eleanor's life. To make her his lawful wife, he must have married her again on Eleanor's death, or the pope must at least have legitimated her children. Even in these times an illegal marriage does not become a valid one, unless, as lady Withfor't says, by an iteration of nuptials. A very recent and celebrated

cause confirms this doctrine. Did not the last earl of Anglesea marry his second wife again after the death of the first?

What the scope or even the meaning of the next paragraph is, I protest I cannot comprehend. What is the meaning of lady Catherine Stafford marrying her father's grandson? In English, it would imply that she married her nephew. Did she? In Edmondson's Peerage, I find that lady Catherine Stafford had by John Talbot earl of Shrewsbury a daughter named Anne, wife of the lord Boteler or Butler of Sudley. As there appears no other female Talbot who married a lord Butler, it was natural to suppose that the christian name of *Anne* was put for Catherine; a mistake so common in voluminous genealogies, that no man of sense can wonder at it. Dugdale says the same, and makes the lady Butler grand-daughter of the duke of Buckingham—Thus, if Buck misled me, Dugdale misled him. But Raphe Brooke, p. 196, makes Eleanor lady Butler, as Mr. Masters does, daughter of John Talbot first earl of Shrewsbury by his second wife Margaret Beauchamp. Indeed Brooke, nor any man else, I believe, but Mr. Masters ever said that a woman was *descended* from her own father. Mr. Masters, taking half of my argument for the whole, by a licence frequent in controversy, says, that to magnify her descent I make her of the royal family: I have said *she was sister of the earl of Shrewsbury, one of the greatest peers in the kingdom, and grand-daughter of the duke of Buckingham, a prince of the blood; an alliance in that age never reckoned unsuitable.* I could not be absurd enough to say a princess of the blood was in that age not reckoned a match unsuitable to the crown. I must have meant that a sister of one great peer and grand-daughter of another descended from Edward III. must have struck the nation as a properer match for the king than the widow Gray—and Mr. Masters, with his usual kindness in assisting me, affirms that lady Eleanor was grand-daughter of the great Beauchamp earl of Warwick, and niece of the duchess of Norfolk, besides being daughter of the first hero of the age. Are not my arguments wonderfully invalidated by such contradiction?

For the wardrobe-account, I will refer the reader to my answer to Dr. Milles. For the rest of Mr. Masters's opinions, containing neither new facts nor arguments, I shall leave them to make for or against me as they may. One instance of his candour I will mention. I have asked why the evidence of the queen-mother, of her daughters, and of a thousand others who had

feen Richard duke of York in his childhood, was not demanded to prove that Perkin Warbeck was an impostor. Mr. Masters has discovered that the queen-dowager was dead: and one of a legion being dead, he thinks it very fair to set aside all the rest. It is just what has been done by all my answerers. They have picked and culled disjointed passages here and there, jumped at a trifling anachronism or two, shunned, carefully shunned the thread of the argument, dreaded and fled from the repeated question on Tirrel's evidence, on which I offered to rest the whole, and taken care to make no reply to the table of arguments that I have recapitulated at the end. Instead of this manly mode of logical argumentation, they have recourse to clamours on great names, and ask me how I dare dispute the authorities of such men as More and Bacon? Mr. Masters, the last of my answerers, is even offended that I laugh at three chancellors. I hope a fourth will reward Him, and then I shall laugh at four.

But I have not incurred this gentleman's displeasure for making free with chancellors alone: he feels even for popish bishops, and in p. 214 reproves my reflections on the catholic clergy who condemned Jane Shore. Yet the very censures that I pass on *holy persons*, are decent, commendable, in found divines. A holy person may call downright names; with impunity he may, in very coarse terms, abuse a prelate, who was both bishop and *chancellor*. In short, Mr. Masters, in p. 206, says of doctor Stillington bishop of Bath and chancellor, that he was a time-serving, revengeful prelate, and acted the part of a pimp to king Edward. That I despise *monkish* historians is most certain, (v. p. 200 of the *Archæol.*) and for these reasons, because they are partial, bigoted to authority, inaccurate, and generally incapable of reasoning: because they illiberally vilify those who are not of their opinion, and yet deny the smallest liberty of censure to others: and, above all, because they prefer absurd traditions to the investigation of truth, and cannot see a sun-beam break into their cell, without being ready to cry Fire! So much do they apprehend the detection of error, so much do they think faith and darkness involved in one common cause. Sir Thomas More and lord Bacon repeat over and over that the murders of the children were uncertain. The true believers, that is the credulous, insist on believing that More and Bacon believed what they say they did not believe, for could they believe what they declare was uncertain? Was it possible for two men of such acute
and

and penetrating genius as More and Bacon to believe that a king and his brother were murdered, that the crime was confessed by the perpetrators, and yet that the fact remained uncertain? A monkish historian may relate such a legend, but one must be a monk or an antiquary to give him credit.

Here therefore I take my leave of All who think credulity in ancient fables a cousin-german of faith, and that great names can legitimate bastard tales by having stood godfathers to them, even though the sponsors have registered their doubts on the spuriousness of the babes they have ushered into the world.

Whilst I had the honour of being member of the Society of Antiquaries, I used my weak endeavours to promote the study of antiquities by publishing ancient pieces really valuable or intrinsically curious; at the same time taking the liberty of blending criticism and free discussion with the passion I had for the remains of past ages; not having quite so much superstition or bigotry as to think that time can stamp value on every thing it has spared, merely by not having destroyed it. I went so far as to hold, that popular lies do not acquire the force of truth solely by having been handed down to us—an opinion, which I confess does not a little clash with the dignity of oral tradition. I have found my error: the president of our learned society, and the reverend Mr. Masters, disapproved of my making common sense the touchstone of legends which two great men had adopted, and three centuries had consecrated. The immortal volumes of our society, the *Archæologia*, which I was once so irreverent as to interpret *old women's logic*, will for ever record my condemnation. The tales, which the acute sceptic Hume thought himself called upon in honour to uphold, only because he had from idleness adopted them, are now irrefragably established in the annals of the society, amidst so many profound researches and conjectures on Danish inscriptions, and Saxon epitaphs in Latin on obscure Romish priests, those relics of ignorant and barbarous ages, of late become the darling occupation of the learned. Richard the Third and I are left to the mercy of that futile posterity, who shall be content with the trifling amusement of reasoning and argumentation; while the more enlightened shall be sustained in their faith by the authority of such great names as those of More, Bacon, Milles, and Masters.

Convinced

Convinced of my unworthiness to fill a seat in so solid an assembly, I resigned my place: and though I shall no more disturb the repose of their *erudite* and *recondite* volumes, I shall wait with impatience for the moment when the venerable academy shall oblige the public with their lucubrations on the history of Whittington and his cat*.

POSTSCRIPT TO MY HISTORIC DOUBTS,

Written in FEBRUARY 1793.

IT is afflictive to have lived to find in an age called not only civilized but enlightened, in this eighteenth century, that such horrors, such unparalleled crimes have been displayed on the most conspicuous theatre in Europe, in Paris the rival of Athens and Rome, that I am forced to allow that a multiplicity of crimes, which I had weakly supposed were too manifold and too absurd to have been perpetrated even in a very dark age, and in a northern island not only not commencing to be polished, but enured to barbarous manners, and hardened by long and barbarous civil wars amongst princes and nobility strictly related—Yes, I must *now* believe that any atrocity may have been attempted or practised by an ambitious prince of the blood aiming at the crown in the fifteenth century. I *can* believe (I do not say I do) that Richard duke of Gloucester dipped his hand in the blood of the saint-like Henry the sixth, though so revolting and injudicious an act as to excite the indignation of mankind against him. I can now believe that he contrived the death of his own brother Clarence—and I can think it possible, inconceivable as it was, that he aspersed the chastity of his own mother, in order to bastardize the offspring of his eldest brother; for all these extravagant excesses have been exhibited in the compass of five years by a monster, by a

* Though the author pays the society the compliment of having left them on a sense of his own unworthiness, he did not really withdraw his name from their register, till their consultation on the story of Whittington and his cat had been brought on the stage by Foote, and had made them ridiculous; as the author of these pages intimated in a letter to their secretary; not thinking he was obliged to share in the ridicule of follies, in which he had no part. H. W.