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Fact and Fiction in Bacon's *Henry VII*

by Michael Landon

In April, 1622, *The Historie of the Raigne of King Henry the Seventh*, "written by the Right Honourable Francis Lord Verulam, Viscount St. Alban. . . . Printed by W. Stansby for Matthew Lownes and William Barrett" was published in London. It was a folio volume of 248 pages and had for a frontispiece an engraved portrait of the first Tudor monarch by John Payne. It was prefaced by a dedicatory epistle "to the most Illustrious and Most Excellent Prince Charles Prince of Wales. . . ."¹

The original manuscript of this, Bacon's only major historical work, may be seen in volume 7084 of the British Museum's Additional Manuscripts Collection, although a few of the pages are missing. It is written in a neat and legible hand and contains some corrections written in by Bacon himself.² Soon after publication of the first edition, the author prepared a Latin translation of the work which was published on the Continent several times during the ensuing century.³

The work was written by Bacon at his country home in Hertfordshire, Gorhambury, during the months immediately following his release from the Tower of London on June 4, 1621. By October, 1621, he had a fair copy of it ready to send to King James I.⁴ The work was written, therefore, in some considerable haste, but it was not the product of a sudden impulse. As a young man, during Queen Elizabeth's reign, Bacon had contemplated writing a history of England from the beginning of Henry VIII's reign down through that of Elizabeth. He had even gone so far as to write a brief introductory fragment of it.⁵

By April, 1605, however, he had formulated a much grander plan and wrote to Lord Chancellor Thomas Egerton soliciting support for

¹ James Spedding, R. L. Ellis and D. I. Heath eds., *The Works of Francis Bacon* (Boston: Brown and Taggard, 1860), XI, 17-18 (editor's Preface).

² *Ibid.*, p. 17.

³ London, British Museum, *Catalogue of Printed Books*, IX, 814.

⁴ Spedding, *Works*, XI, 13-14.

⁵ *Ibid.* The original can be seen in the British Museum, Harleian MSS, 532, f. 45.

a proposed "just and complete history" of the island of Great Britain.⁶ Finally, in his *Advancement of Learning*, published just a few months later and addressed to King James, he declared that it was his intention to limit the scope of his proposed history to "a much smaller compass of [time . . . that is to say from the Union of the roses to the Union of] the Kingdoms."⁷ His *Henry VII* was to be the only part of the proposed work ever written, and it would not be written until another sixteen years had passed.

During those months of 1621 that Bacon was finally writing his history, he was barred by royal command from coming into or near London. He was forced, therefore, to rely for source materials on his own library and papers, on his memory, and on certain documents supplied to him by his friend, the famous antiquarian Sir Robert Cotton.⁸ James Spedding, one of his nineteenth-century editors and admirers, conceded that the work "bears indeed some traces of the haste with which it was written," but pointed out that "the theory of the events of Henry's reign as formed and expounded by him [had] been adopted by every succeeding historian as the basis of his narrative."⁹ Even today we find that a recently published biography of Henry cites Bacon by name eleven times and only takes issue with him once.¹⁰ The reliability of his history is certainly, therefore, a very important consideration for students of the period.

The first severe criticism of it came during the 1830's, when a new breed of historians, with an increasingly scientific approach to the past, found Bacon's casual methods deplorable. Furthermore, influenced by the prevailing liberal political ethos of their day, they were affronted by the opinions on matters of statecraft of a man who seemed to have been essentially an exponent of enlightened despotism.

The liberal whig historian Sir James Mackintosh, in his *History of*

⁶ Basil Montagu, ed., *The Works of Francis Bacon* (Philadelphia: A. Hart, 1853), III, 23-24.

⁷ Spedding, *Works*, VIII, 427.

⁸ *Ibid.*, XI, 14. Sir Robert Bruce Cotton (1571-1631) possessed a remarkable collection of historical documents at his London home, Cotton House. In 1608, Bacon made a note in his notebook that he ought to make himself better acquainted with the contents of Cotton's *Library-Dictionary of National Biography*, sub Cotton.

⁹ Spedding, *Works*, XI, 14-15.

¹⁰ Eric N. Simons, *Henry VII* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1968).

England (1831), claimed that "the defects of Bacon's nature conspired with the faults of his conception of history to taint his work. . . ."¹¹ As he saw it, the ex-Lord Chancellor, just out of the Tower, in disgrace, and "galled by an unhonoured poverty," was desperately anxious to curry the favor of King James in order that he might be restored to lucrative office. Writing a laudatory history of the reign of the last English king from whom James was descended might well be expected to help. "What wonder, if, in these circumstances even his genius sank under such a patron and such a theme." And that the result was a "lukewarm censure of falsehood and extortion, with a cool display of the expedients of cunning, and with too systematic a representation of the policy of a monarch in whose history he chose to convey a theory of kingcraft, and the likeness of its ideal model."¹² Bacon, in other words, had been too kind to Henry VII.

While Mackintosh was the first to criticize the basic conception of Bacon's history, its factual accuracy was first impugned by Sir Frederick Madden, who in an article, published in *Archeologia* in 1838,¹³ pointed out that, because of a misreading of the sources, Bacon's account of the Perkin Warbeck affair was exceedingly confused. "This," he sneered, "is a fair specimen of the manner in which our writers of history formerly imposed their own inaccurate notions on the public as the result of laborious investigation."¹⁴ The entire work he dismissed as being "little more in truth than a repetition of what he found in preceding writers, eked out and embellished in a style accordant with the prevailing taste of the time."¹⁵

James Spedding, the principal editor of the first thoroughly annotated, complete edition of Bacon's works, came to the author's defense in the introduction to his edition of the *History* published in 1858.¹⁶ Replying to Mackintosh's earlier criticism, Spedding ac-

¹¹ Lardner's Cabinet Encyclopedia Edition (London: Longman's 1831), II, 362. The punctuation is Mackintosh's.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ "Documents relating to Perkin Warbeck, with Remarks on his History," *Archeologia*, XXVII, 153-210.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* For details of Bacon's errors in regard to Warbeck see below.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

¹⁶ The Spedding, Ellis, and Heath edition of Bacon's complete works was published in London by Longman & Co. in 14 vols. between 1857 and 1874, and in Boston by Brown and Taggard in 15 vols. between 1860 and 1864. *The History of Henry VII*, edited by Spedding, is in vol. VI (1858) of the London edition, and in

knowledged that Bacon was anxious to please James in the late months of 1621 and that Bacon must have realized as he wrote the work that a good history of so important a reign was "certain to be appreciated" by the King. However, he pointed out, Bacon did not choose the particular subject simply because it gave him an opportunity to gratify James. Sixteen years earlier he had decided to begin his history with an account of Henry VII's reign, and this was the first time that he had had sufficient leisure time to compose it. Furthermore, the portrait that Bacon provides of Henry's character was not one that was compiled at the time of writing the history. It agrees exactly with his summary of that king's character given in his fragmentary history written decades before during Elizabeth's reign.¹⁷ "Far from being a flattering portrait, it shows Henry possessed of the traits of coldness, reserve, suspicion, avarice, parsimony, party-spirit, partiality in the administration of justice when he was himself interested, finesse which was not policy, strength of will which blinded judgment. . . ."¹⁸ Such a portrayal was obviously not designed for its appeal to the subject's great-great grandson.

Spedding answered Mackintosh's condemnation of Bacon's failure to denounce some of Henry's actions by quoting Bacon's own personal view of the role of a historian: "to represent the events themselves, together with the counsels; and to leave the observation and conclusions thereupon to the liberty and faculty of every man's judgment."¹⁹ It was true, of course, as Madden had pointed out, that Bacon is wrong about some of the events; but, Spedding felt, he himself had rectified this by supplying corrections and additional information wherever necessary in the notes to his edition. He was of the opinion that Bacon's history, as amended, could "now be recommended not only as the richest, clearest, and liveliest narrative, and in general effect the most faithful portraiture of the time . . . but also as the most complete in detail, and the most accurate in information."²⁰

vol. XI (1860) of the Boston edition which was used in preparing this article—see note 1 above.

¹⁷ Spedding, *Works*, XI, 20–40.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

¹⁹ *The Advancement of Learning*, bk. 2, para. 7, quoted in Spedding, *Works*, XI, 29–30.

²⁰ Spedding, *Works*, XI, 19.

Spedding's notes were, most of them, incorporated, into another edition of the history published in 1882 by the Reverend J. L. Lumby, who added some notes of his own together with a chronological chart of the reign and a glossary of archaic words used in the text.²¹ Lumby's edition was used by the German Wilhelm Busch in preparing the first volume of his *England Unter Den Tudors* (1892), an English translation of which was published in London in 1895.²²

In a bibliographical appendix to his volume, Busch surveyed all the major source materials for the reign. Bacon's history, he concluded, is admirable for its classical style and perfection of narrative, but is "almost useless as an *original authority*."²³ "We possess," Busch said, "almost all the direct and indirect sources of information from which he drew, and he shows, in the use he made of them, such indifference as regards simple historical truth, that he must as a voucher for facts, appear to us in a very doubtful light."²⁴ He wondered that "Spedding, who in his notes brought forward such overwhelming evidence of Bacon's untrustworthiness endeavored at the same time in the oddest way to establish Bacon's excellence and reliability."²⁵

In the twentieth century, nevertheless, Spedding's opinion as to the value of Bacon's history has been generally accepted by English historians, and the work has continued to be both praised and used. "Spedding," claimed Thomas Fowler, in discussing the controversy over the history in his article on Bacon in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, "has a better title to be heard on this subject than any other authority." And A. F. Pollard, in the introduction to his own documentary history of *The Reign of Henry VII* (1913), gave it as his opinion that "in spite of adverse criticism, Bacon's Henry VII remains an indispensable guide to the understanding of Henry's reign. Bacon is incomparably the greatest man who has ever tried to elucidate Henry's mind and policy; and his sources of information were not so inadequate as seriously to impair the value of his judgment."

²¹ J. L. Lumby, *Bacon's History of the Reign of Henry VII*, (Pitt Press Series; Cambridge: University Press, 1882).

²² Wilhelm Busch, *England under the Tudors, King Henry VII*, trans. A.M. Todd (Burt Franklin Research and Source Works Series 80; New York; 1967). This is a reprint of the edition published in London in 1895 by A. D. Innes & Co.

²³ Busch, *Tudors*, p. 422.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 423.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 422.

Pollard argued further that the opinions of Bacon, as "Lord Chancellor, and one of the greatest of them," on the legislative and judicial aspects of the reign were well worth having. "And none but the sorriest pedant [Busch?]," he concluded, "would permit the defects in Bacon's historical knowledge and the laxity of his imagination to blind him to the historical value of Bacon's political insight and experience."²⁶

Six years later, H. A. L. Fisher wrote, in the volume of his *Political History of England* that covers the reigns of Henry VII and Henry VIII,²⁷ that, while he essentially agreed with Busch's criticisms, he still felt that Bacon's work was a most important secondary authority. Its merit, he claimed, lay "not in the novelty of [Bacon's] facts, nor in his fidelity to strict historical canons, but in his sagacity, his humour, his breadth and keenness of vision, and the brilliancy of his style."²⁸ Altogether Fisher cited Bacon as a source nineteen times.²⁹

A generation later J. D. Mackie in his volume *The Earlier Tudors* (1951) cited Bacon more than thirty times and only rarely took issue with him. In a bibliographical note he stated his opinion that Bacon's work "though written in great haste . . . none the less is a great biography marked by the true insight of a man of the age."³⁰

Bacon's *Henry VII*, then, has continued to be much used and admired. But can we afford to ignore the strictures of the work's nineteenth-century critics? Since some of Bacon's errors are still being incorporated into modern texts, and even more of them are being taught as verified facts by teachers to their students, perhaps historians and students of English Renaissance literature need to be reminded of them once again.

Mackintosh's criticism of Bacon's failure to include a conventionally liberal denunciation of King Henry's political attitudes and actions seems rather excessive and dated to us today. More valid, surely, is the

²⁶ *The Reign of Henry VII—from Contemporary Sources* (3 vols.; University of London Historical Series; Longmans, 1913), I, xiv-xv.

²⁷ *The Political History of England in Twelve Volumes* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1919), V.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 487.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, index.

³⁰ *The Earlier Tudors* (Oxford History of England; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), p. 617.

complaint voiced by Madden and Busch that Bacon has merely compiled a not very accurate summary of material derived from earlier writers.³¹ "The result of a wearisome examination, sentence by sentence [of Bacon's work]," complained Busch, was that "in almost every case we can refer to the original authorities, which formed the basis for Bacon's statements, and find that, with unimportant exceptions, we possess all these authorities ourselves."³²

Both Madden and Busch agree that Bacon's basic sources were three in number: first, the *Anglica Historia* of Polydore Vergil as it was reproduced by Edward Hall in his *Chronicle* (1584); second, the "Vita" and the "Annals" of Henry VII compiled by his poet laureate, Bernard André; and third, the "London Chronicle" of Robert Fabian.³³ Since André's and Fabian's manuscripts had not yet been published in 1621, Bacon probably obtained them from the collection of his friend Cotton.

Now that they have been published, however; do we any longer need Bacon? H. A. L. Fisher reminded us that, in addition to Bacon's three basic sources, he may well have made use of other manuscript sources from Cotton's collection which have now been lost. Also, he may have derived a great deal of valid information concerning Henry's reign from oral tradition.³⁴ Granted; but, if Bacon has used his major known sources carelessly, then his entire work must be regarded with a great deal of suspicion.

Concerning Bacon's work with his original sources, Busch claimed to have found "one example after another of the superficial and arbitrary manner in which he dealt with the information he culled from his authorities, while he gave the fullest play to his imagination."³⁵ A thorough re-check by this writer has shown that, apart from a few errors in regard to page numbers and volume numbers (perhaps typographical), Busch has correctly identified Bacon's original sources and has convincingly documented most, though not all, of his charges against him of carelessness and misinterpretation.

³¹ Madden, "Documents," p. 154; Busch, *Tudors*, p. 417.

³² Busch, *Tudors*, p. 417.

³³ Madden "Documents," p. 154; Busch, *Tudors*, p. 417. For Hall's use of Polydore Vergil see Busch, *Tudors*, p. 418.

³⁴ Fisher, *Political History*, p. 487. Bacon as Lord Chancellor presumably had had personal access to many of the state documents remaining from Henry VII's reign.

³⁵ *Tudors*, p. 420.

Probably Bacon's most widely-noted error is the one he made in describing how Henry, shortly after Bosworth, entered London for the first time as King: "himself not being on horseback, or in any open chair or throne, but in a close chariot; as one that . . . chose rather to keep state and strike a reverence into the people than fawn upon them."³⁶ The mistake here Bacon evidently derived from John Speed's *History of Great Britain* in which the author reports that: "Andreas said the king entered *covertly*, meaning, belike, in a horse-litter or close chariot." In fact Bernard André, in his life of Henry, had described him as entering London *laetanter* (joyously) which Speed misread as *latenter* (furtively).³⁷ A small error, but one that considerably influences the reader's view of Henry's character and of his policies at that particular stage of his career.

Where Bacon probably leads the reader most astray is in his account of the course of Anglo-French relations between 1488 and 1492 when King Henry was trying to prevent King Charles VIII of France from bringing the province of Brittany under his direct rule. Not only is Bacon very confused as to the proper chronology of the events he describes,³⁸ but also he frequently mistakes for meetings of Parliament what were in fact Great Council meetings. The latter were meetings of the lords spiritual and temporal and also of representatives of the chief towns and cities, assembled by the King in order to obtain a temporary loan or a benevolence, and also to pave the way for the future assembling of a Parliament which would be asked to vote subsidies.³⁹

In his account of Henry's second parliament, which assembled in November, 1487, for example, Bacon has the Lord Chancellor, John Morton, in his opening speech, deal with events in France that did not take place until the summer of 1488. Apparently he has the parliament confused with a Great Council meeting held by the King in Novem-

³⁶ *Works*, XI, 53.

³⁷ James Gairdner, ed., *Memorials of Henry VII* (Rolls Series, London: Longman, 1858), pp. xxv-xxvi, 33-35. This volume includes Bernard André's *Vita Henrici Septimi* and his *Annales Henrici VII* as well as other materials on the reign. See also James Gairdner, *Henry the Seventh* (Twelve English Statesman Series; London: Macmillan, 1889), p. 33, and Mackie, *Earlier Tudors*, p. 542.

³⁸ See Lumby's Chronological Table; also the notes in Lumby and Spedding *passim*.

³⁹ Spedding, *Works*, XI, 114ff., 176ff., 260ff. and appendix 1. See also Gairdner *Henry the Seventh*, p. 150.

ber, 1488.⁴⁰ Such errors of chronology and terminology, however, are compounded by the fact that Morton's speech itself is evidently Bacon's own creation. Certainly it bears no relation to the brief speech that Morton is recorded as having made at the opening of the 1487 parliament in Volume VI of the *Rotuli Parliamentorum*; a speech which deals in a general way with the desirability of law and order and of strong justice, and not with foreign affairs at all.⁴¹

The same seems to be true of the speech, asking for financial aid for his proposed invasion of France, that Bacon has Henry deliver at the opening of the parliamentary session of October, 1491.⁴² According to the *Rotuli Parliamentorum*, it was Morton who, as usual, made the opening speech on that occasion.⁴³ Polydore Vergil, however, does tell us that Henry, in 1491, "having summoned a council of his nobles . . . first outlined the reasons for starting a war against the French and then asked them to decide to provide for this war with both men and money."⁴⁴ Spedding explained, and Gairdner agreed with him, that here we have reference to another Great Council which Henry assembled and addressed in the summer of 1491 and which agreed to grant him a "benevolence" to tide him over until the Parliament could assemble in October.⁴⁵ Except for Polydore Vergil's brief summation, we have no account of what the King said to the Council. Mackie pointed out that a great deal of the phraseology which Bacon has Henry employ in his imaginary speech to the Parliament paraphrases fairly exactly the arguments used by the commons in the preamble to their grant of subsidies for the French War.⁴⁶

Yet a third fictional speech is attributed by Bacon to Robert Gagnien (or Gaugin), prior of the Order of the Trinity, whom he makes the spokesman for the three-man embassy that was sent by the French King late in 1498 to try to persuade Henry not to intervene in Brittany.⁴⁷ The contemporary account of their visit, given by Bernard

⁴⁰ Spedding, *Works*, XI, 114ff. The Great Council Meeting of November, 1488, helped prepare the way for the parliamentary session of January, 1489.

⁴¹ *Rotuli Parliamentorum*, VI, 385.

⁴² Spedding, *Works*, XI, 176ff.

⁴³ VI, 440.

⁴⁴ Denys Hays, *The Anglica Historia of Polydore Vergil* (Camden Series, LXXIV; London: Royal Historical Society, 1950), 49. Edward Hall, *Chronicle*, ed. H. F. Ellis (London, 1809), p. 451, gives essentially the same brief summary.

⁴⁵ Spedding, *Works*, XI, 177n. Gairdner, *Henry the Seventh*, p. 150.

⁴⁶ *Earlier Tudors*, pp. 106–107.

⁴⁷ Spedding, *Works*, XI, 158ff.

André in his "Vita" provides only a very short summary of what they had to say.⁴⁸

Bacon's use of apparently fictional speeches was defended by Spedding firstly by suggesting that perhaps Bacon had access to manuscript copies, or at least summaries of the speeches given which have since been lost.⁴⁹ Secondly, and rather contrarily, he argued that the text of a speech given by Bacon was "of course to be taken, not as a report of what [the speaker] really said, but as a representation of what Bacon imagined that such a person, in such circumstances, with such ends in view, would or should have said."⁵⁰ Citing Thucydides as an example, he reminded us that the best of ancient historians resorted to the same device.⁵¹ And, indeed, Thucydides in the introduction to his *History* confessed:

As to the speeches which were made either before or during the war, it was hard for me, and for others who reported them to me, to recollect the exact words. I have therefore put into the mouth of each speaker the sentiments proper to the occasion, expressed as I thought he would be likely to express them, while at the same time I endeavoured, as nearly as I could to give the general purport of what was actually said.⁵²

Bacon, being a Renaissance historian, may be excused for resorting to what was accepted practice among ancient historians. The modern student however, brought up on the notion that anything put between quotation marks is a genuine quotation, is apt to be seriously misled. Certainly William Cobbett was when in his *Parliamentary History* he relied almost entirely on Bacon for his account of the parliaments of Henry's reign—an account that is consequently very inaccurate and also chronologically muddled.⁵³

Bacon confuses his readers almost as much in his description of the Perkin Warbeck affair. He begins by providing them with an ex-

⁴⁸ Gairdner, *Memorials*, pp. 55–56.

⁴⁹ *Works*, XI, 116n., 159n., 178n.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 166n.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² B. Jowett, trans., *Thucydides' History of the Peloponnesian War* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1881), I, 15.

⁵³ Wm. Cobbett, ed., *Parliamentary History of England* (London: R. Bagshaw; Longmans & Co., 1806–12), I, 448–475. For an accurate chronology of the parliaments of the reign see the *Cambridge Modern History* (New York: Macmillan, 1911), XIII, table 147.

tremely distorted account of the youthful pretender's background. The true facts, derived from Warbeck's own confession, apparently are these: Perkin was born at Tournai, in Flanders, the son of one John Osbeck, a boatman, and his wife Katherine de Faro. During his teens he served as an apprentice with various merchants, first in Antwerp and later in England. He then went to Portugal in the service of the wife of Sir Edward Brampton. He stayed there for a year in the service of a Portuguese knight, and finally entered the service of Prégent Menno, a Breton merchant, with whom he went to Ireland. There, in the city of Cork, he was discovered by Yorkist agents who, impressed by his youthful good looks and proud manner, recruited him to play the role of Richard, Duke of York, younger son of Edward IV. The real Duke of York had supposedly been murdered in the Tower together with his elder brother Edward V on the orders of Richard III. Perkin Warbeck was to be presented as the young prince, who, having miraculously escaped his elder brother's unlucky fate, was now coming forward to assert his rightful claim to the English throne.⁵⁴

Warbeck's confession had, of course, to meet the approval of King Henry, and Bernard André tells us that it was published at the King's command.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, it must be essentially accurate for, as James Gairdner points out, both of the pretender's parents and other close relations were still alive in Tournai; and if it had been a fabrication, they could have testified as much to all of Europe.⁵⁶

Bacon, for his part, tells that Warbeck's father was:

John Osbeck, (a converted Jew) married to Katheren de Faro, whose business drew him to live for a time with his wife at London in King Edward the Fourth's days; during which time he had a son by her; and being known in court, the King either out of religious nobleness, because he was a convert, or upon some private acquaintance, did him the honour as to be godfather to his child, and named him Peter.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ For the text of the confession, see *English Historical Documents*, V, 119–21. It is also to be found in *Hall's Chronicle*, ed. H. F. Ellis (London, 1809), pp. 488–89.

⁵⁵ Gairdner, *Memorials*, p. 73.

⁵⁶ James Gairdner, *History of the Life and Reign of Richard the Third—to which is added the story of Perkin Warbeck from original documents* (Cambridge: University Press, 1898), pp. 265–66, 334–35. For an explanation of why the first syllable of Warbeck's surname was different from that of his father, see Busch, *Tudors*, p. 335.

⁵⁷ Spedding, *Works*, XI, 202–203.

This account he apparently draws from the text of the confession and partly from Bernard André, through John Speed. André says in his "Vita" that Perkin Warbeck had been a "servant in England to a Jew named Edward who was baptized by Edward the Fourth," and whom the King adopted as his godson so that he became "on terms of intimacy with the King and his family."⁵⁸ Citing André as his source, Speed in his *History* carelessly states that Warbeck, rather than being the servant, was the "son of a converted Jew, whose god father at baptism King Edward himself was."⁵⁹ And finally Bacon, equally careless, carries the error one step further when he makes Perkin himself King Edward's godson; and does so in a way that has caused some to consider that perhaps Warbeck was actually King Edward's illegitimate son.⁶⁰

The identity of Edward, the converted Jew is no mystery. He was Sir Edward Brampton, a Jewish native of Portugal who, in return "for his good service to the King in many battles," in October, 1472, was granted by King Edward denizen status in England and also some tenements in the city of London.⁶¹ In order to become a landholder and a knight he must have become a Christian. A staunch adherent of the house of York, Brampton, nevertheless, in 1489, received a general pardon from Henry VII presumably for his previous pro-Yorkist activities. In the document of pardon he is described variously as a "merchant," as a "gentleman," and as a "godson of Edward IV."⁶²

Bernard André and Polydore Vergil—and Hall borrowing from Vergil and Bacon borrowing from Hall—all agree in stating that Margaret of Burgundy had already recruited Warbeck and trained him to impersonate the Duke of York prior to his going to Ireland in the autumn of 1491.⁶³ Hall and Bacon add that Margaret sent the pretender first to Portugal for a year to lie low, and then ordered him

⁵⁸ Gairdner, *Memorials*, pp. 65–66, 72.

⁵⁹ Quoted in Madden, "Documents," pp. 162–63.

⁶⁰ Gairdner, *Memorials*, p. xxx.

⁶¹ Great Britain, Public Record Office, *Calendar of the Patent Rolls* (Edward IV and Henry VI), p. 357.

⁶² Great Britain, Public Record Office, *Calendar of the Patent Rolls* (Henry VII), I, 274. Presumably Brampton had taken his "Christian name" of Edward from that of the king, his sponsor.

⁶³ Gairdner, *Memorials*, p. 65; Hayes, *Polydore Vergil*, pp. 63–64; Hall, *Chronicle*, p. 462; Spedding, *Works*, XI, 203–206. For the evidence that Warbeck was in Ireland in the autumn of 1491, see Spedding, *Works*, XI, 206n., and Gairdner, *Richard the Third*, 272.

to Ireland at a time when, because of the coming Anglo-French War, it seemed that their plans might have a good chance of success.⁶⁴ Drawing presumably from the confession, Bacon provides the further information that Warbeck went to Portugal in the service of Lady Brampton, who as the wife of Sir Edward Brampton, a loyal Yorkist, might have been expected to assist Margaret in carrying out her scheme. But, as we have seen, Brampton by this time had made his peace with King Henry; and later on he would be the one to give the king the complete details as to Warbeck's actual background.⁶⁵ Indeed Bacon does not imply that Lady Brampton had any knowledge of what Warbeck was planning to do. Be that as it may, both Busch and Gairdner argued rather convincingly, that the confession must be regarded as the most accurate account of the pretender's story, and that André and Vergil, as well as Hall and Bacon, are wrong in saying that Margaret had recruited him on the Continent before he ever went to Ireland.⁶⁶

Bacon seems to have drawn mainly upon his imagination for his detailed account of the coaching which Margaret allegedly gave Warbeck to prepare him to assume his role as the missing Duke of York.⁶⁷ In his own confession Warbeck mentions no coaching at all by Margaret, stating only that the Yorkists in Ireland "made me to learn English, and taught me what I should do and say. . . ." Polydore Vergil claims that Margaret, before sending Warbeck to Ireland, "kept the young man for some time secretly in her court, instructing him methodically in English affairs and in the lineage of her house of York, so that afterwards he should readily remember everything and convince all by his performance. . . ." And Hall says essentially the same.⁶⁸ But, as Gairdner pointed out, "neither Polydore's words nor Hall's, nor indeed those of any writer before Lord Bacon, at all justify the minute description which the author gives of his training, and which, supported by his great name, has been received for history ever since."⁶⁹

⁶⁴ Hall, *Chronicle*, p. 462; Spedding, *Works*, XI, 205–206.

⁶⁵ *The Great Chronicle of London*, ed. A. H. Thomas and I. D. Thornley (London: Library Committee of the Corporation, 1937), p. 262.

⁶⁶ Gairdner, *Richard the Third*, p. 268; Busch, *Tudors*, pp. 335–36. Very likely the coincidence that Warbeck was a native of Flanders, where Margaret was living, caused André and the others to assume that she had been the one to recruit him.

⁶⁷ Spedding, *Works*, XI, 204–05.

⁶⁸ *Chronicle*, p. 461.

⁶⁹ *Memorials*, p. xxxii.

Bacon's version of Warbeck's Speech to the Scottish King, James IV, in November, 1495, soliciting his assistance for an invasion of England, is derived indirectly from the version given by Polydore Vergil.⁷⁰ Hall borrowed Vergil's version but inserted some additional material of his own.⁷¹ Bacon then used Hall, including his additions, and added yet further additions, including a totally new concluding portion of the speech. This he took, almost word for word, from Speed's version of Warbeck's proclamation issued by the pretender at the time of his invasion of England at the head of the Scottish army early in 1496.⁷² A few pages later Bacon gives his version of the proclamation, and in a marginal note tells the reader that a copy of the original is among Cotton's collection of manuscripts. It is true that he only claims to give the "tenor" of the proclamation; and Spedding rather apologetically explained that, apart from what he got from Speed, Bacon must have had to rely on his memory of the document, having read it some time before. But it is given as a direct quotation, and it differs very considerably from the actual text of the original proclamation which was provided by Spedding in an appendix.⁷³

Busch was probably being overly censorious when he complained that Bacon, having taken his account of the capture of Granada from the Moors by Ferdinand and Isabella from Hall, added on his own authority that the news of it came to Henry from the Spanish sovereigns.⁷⁴ Hall in fact says that King Henry ordered a Thanksgiving service to be held in Saint Paul's Cathedral to celebrate the event and that during the course of it Cardinal Morton read to those present a detailed account of the taking of the Moorish city.⁷⁵ Bacon was certainly entitled to surmise that the information had reached England in letters from the triumphant royal couple. And Busch was definitely wrong when he accused Bacon of ascribing to Henry the statement, in a letter written to the Lord Mayor and Aldermen of London, that by arranging such excellent marriages for his children he had built "a wall of brass" around his kingdom. Bacon merely says that the King

⁷⁰ Spedding, *Works*, XI, 245-49; Hayes, *Polydore Vergil*, pp. 86-87.

⁷¹ *Chronicle*, pp. 473-74.

⁷² Spedding, *Works*, XI, 245n.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 251, 252n., appendix 2.

⁷⁴ Busch, *Tudors*, p. 419; Spedding, *Works*, XI, 189.

⁷⁵ *Chronicle*, p. 454.

expressed "himself as if he thought he had built a wall of brass around his kingdom. . . ."76

Busch was apparently correct, on the other hand, in his assertion that Bacon alone gives the names *Intercursus Magnus* and *Intercursus Malus* to the commercial treaties of 1496 and 1506, respectively, with Flanders. But he did not, as Pollard pointed out, disprove Bacon's actual statement that "the Flemmings" called the two treaties by those names in his day.⁷⁷ While Gairdner in his biography used the two names for the treaties without comment, Mackie did attribute the naming of the second treaty (*Malus*) to Bacon.⁷⁸

Busch was correct also in his claim that Bacon is our only authority for what is probably the most oft-repeated anecdote of Henry VII's reign: the story of the Earl of Oxford being fined fifteen thousand marks (£10,000) for an offence against the laws of livery and maintenance. Bacon tells us how the Earl fell foul of the King's laws when he mounted an honor guard of liveried retainers while the King himself was paying a visit at his country home, Castle Hedingham, in Essex; but he prefaces his tale with the assertion: "There remaineth to this day a report, that. . . ."79 Pollard, while remarking that "no contemporary authority has been discovered for [the] familiar story," was apparently willing to accept it anyway.⁸⁰ We do know for a fact that King Henry visited Hedingham during August 6–12, 1498; and although one of Oxford's biographers considered that "the amount of the fine sounds incredible," we also know that some eight years later Lord Bergevenny was fined almost seven times as much for a similar offence.⁸¹ Thus, Bacon's "report" could very well be true, though we may never know for sure.

Busch was correct yet again when he pointed out that the well

76 Busch, *Tudors*, p. 419; Spedding, *Works*, XI, p. 353. The full text of Henry's letter is in J. O. Halliwell, ed., *Letters of the Kings of England* (two vols. in one, London: Henry Colburn, 1846), I, 194–96; the original is among the Cotton MSS in the British Museum.

77 Busch, *Tudors*, p. 421; Spedding, *Works*, XI, 260, 346; Pollard, *Reign of Henry VII*, I, 127n.

78 Gairdner, *Henry VII*, pp. 147, 195; Mackie, *Earlier Tudors*, pp. 139, 186.

79 Busch, *Tudors*, p. 421; Spedding, *Works*, XI, 327–28.

80 *Reign of Henry VII*, II, 65n.

81 *Dictionary of National Biography*. For Lord Bergevenny's Case, see Spedding, *Works*, XI, 328, quoting British Museum, Harleian MSS, 1877, f. 47.

known story of "Morton's fork" recorded and passed down to us by Bacon is apparently inaccurate in regard to one very important detail. The earliest version of the story is to be found in book ii (not, as Busch said, book iv) of Erasmus's *Ecclesiastae sive de ratione concionandi*, published in Basle in 1535. There the great humanist, who claimed to have heard of it originally from his good friend, Sir Thomas More, attributed the wily scheme for extracting "benevolences" from unwilling donors not to Archbishop Morton but to Richard Fox, Bishop of Winchester (1501–1528).⁸²

John Hooker, the Exeter antiquary and scholar, in his edition of Holinshed's *Chronicle* (1586–87), also claimed that it was Fox who employed the famous "dilemma" to raise benevolences in 1504.⁸³ As Fox's biographer in the *Dictionary of National Biography* pointed out, the weight of the evidence seems to favor Fox as being the author of the scheme. But, while Bacon only claims that there was a "tradition" that Morton had suggested the employment of such a scheme to the commissioners responsible for collecting benevolences, and is rather vague as to just when he did so, Gairdner in his biography cited Bacon as his authority for stating categorically that Morton did so instruct the commissioners in 1491. Pollard, for his part, simply remarked that Bacon is the authority for ascribing the scheme to Morton and that the *Dictionary of National Biography* article on Fox ascribed it to Fox.⁸⁴ Meanwhile, the story of "Morton's fork" continues to be told in the textbooks.

So it seems we must agree with Busch's contention that the "anecdotes in Bacon should be regarded with mistrust, until some other testimony is forthcoming to support them."⁸⁵ Much more important from the historian's point of view, however, is the truth of the German professor's claim that our entire impression of Henry's character is based solely upon what Bacon said concerning it nearly twelve decades after Henry's death. In regard particularly to the king's reputation

⁸² Busch, *Tudors*, p. 421. Spedding, *Works*, XI, p. 184. Erasmus seems to imply an amusing coincidence in the vulpine cunning of such a scheme and the name of Fox.

⁸³ Raphael Holinshed, *Chronicle*, ed. H. F. Ellis (6 vols.; New York: AMS Press Inc., 1965), III, p. 352; *DNB*, sub John Hooker. Fox was suffragan bishop of Exeter, 1487–91.

⁸⁴ Gairdner, *Henry VII*, p. 151; Pollard, *Reign of Henry VII*, II, 47.

⁸⁵ Busch, *Tudors*, p. 422.

for avarice, even Spedding, Bacon's arch-defender, Busch pointed out, had to agree. Commenting on Henry's fining of William Capel, a London Alderman, sixteen hundred pounds for various misdemeanors, in which Bacon suggests that Henry was motivated more by greed than need, Spedding said:

It is worth observing that the predominance of avarice in Henry's character (which has since become almost proverbial, and to which our modern historians refer almost every action of his life), had not been noticed by any historian before Bacon. . . .⁸⁶

But, while Busch and Spedding were probably right in claiming that Bacon is the source for the *modern* historians' belief in Henry's avariciousness, Spedding was wrong in stating that no other historian had noticed that quality in the King before Bacon.

It was Busch himself who pointed out in his bibliographical appendix that Hall, Stowe, and Bacon all apparently used a common manuscript source, a "London Chronicle," which has since been lost. Furthermore, he provided convincing evidence that the missing source was written by Robert Fabian (d. 1511), a London Alderman, who is known to us as the author of the *New Chronicles of England and France*, published in 1516 and again in 1533.⁸⁷ The first edition of the *New Chronicles* ends with the year 1485, but the second includes a brief continuation giving a London-oriented outline of Henry VII's reign. This continuation, Busch demonstrated, must have been condensed from a much fuller chronicle written by Fabian himself—the "London Chronicle." The most complete version of Fabian's original that Busch could find was the "City Chronicle" which is among the Cotton manuscripts in the British Museum (Vitellius A XVI), edited and published in 1905 by C. L. Kingsford who agreed that it is an abridged version of a fuller contemporary text.⁸⁸ In 1937 an even more complete version of the "London Chronicle," one which had been discovered a short while before in a private collection, was published by the Library Committee of the Corporation of London under

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 420–21; Spedding, *Works*, XI, p. 234.

⁸⁷ Busch, *Tudors*, pp. 403–15. The most modern edition of the *New Chronicles* is that by H. F. Ellis (London, 1811).

⁸⁸ In *Chronicles of London*, ed. C. L. Kingsford (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905).

the title: *The Great Chronicle of London*.⁸⁹ Its editors, A. H. Thomas and I. D. Thornley, referred to and essentially agreed with Busch's theory as to Fabian's authorship, though they thought he might have been assisted by a collaborator. They concluded, however, that even the *Great Chronicle*, because it lacks some details that are to be found in Hall and Bacon and the others, is still not Fabian's complete original text.⁹⁰

Incomplete or not, all the experts agree that the *Great Chronicle* was written by Fabian or by some other contemporary of King Henry VII. Summing up the King's character after telling of his death, it concludes:

to him alle vertu was allyed and noo vyce In hym took place, except oonly avaryce The whych was a blemysch to his magnyficence. . . . *But* and that vyce hadd been clerely quenched & put ffrom him, I dowbth not, but he mygth have been pereless of alle princis that Regnyd ovyr England syne the tyme of Edward the thyrd, . . .⁹¹

Holinshed's *Chronicle* (1586–1587) contains two references to Henry's reputation for avarice.⁹² Bacon who, as Busch himself proved, used Fabian, and who must have been familiar with Holinshed, surely was justified, therefore, in emphasizing avariciousness as one of Henry's dominant characteristics.

We may safely conclude then that Bacon's *History* does give us an essentially valid impression of King Henry VII and of his reign; thus it does satisfy one of the major requirements of good historical writing. But, at the same time, we must admit that Busch was correct in his claim that it is very often wrong, or at any rate misleading, with regard to the precise factual details of the period it covers, and most modern historians would agree that factual correctness is something to be aimed at in writing history. Certainly, Bacon's work is a classic of renaissance historiography which, even Busch conceded, is "brilliantly written . . . fascinating and inspiring in its insight and power of description."⁹³ That does not, however, justify our treating it as

⁸⁹ Only 500 copies of this *Great Chronicle* were printed.

⁹⁰ *Great Chronicle*, editors' intro., *passim*.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 338–39.

⁹² III, 531, 542.

⁹³ Busch, *Tudors*, p. 422.

a primary source for events that occurred more than a hundred years before it was written. The serious, advanced scholar will want to examine for himself the contemporary records of the period, most of which have already been competently compiled and edited by Gairdner and Pollard. A major new contemporary source has been made available to the researcher by the publication of the *Great Chronicle*. The graduate student, and the under-graduate student even more so, is advised to avoid Bacon's work because, enjoyable though it may be to read, it can only confuse him. If he must read it, let him read Spedding's or better still, Lumby's annotated edition.⁹⁴ Until an accurate, up-to-date history of Henry VII's reign is written and published for the student reader, he will find the most reliable account of it in the third through the seventh chapters of Mackie's *Earlier Tudors*.

⁹⁴ The Folio Society published a new edition of Bacon's work in August, 1971. I have not yet seen it, but its editor, Mr. Roger Lockyer, informs me that it is essentially the same as Lumby's edition, with some slight alterations and additions.