

## Thomas More Reader: Historical Portraits and Vignettes

### 27. "King Edward IV"

[From *The History of King Richard the Third* ; Works, pp. 35b-36a]

He was a goodly personage and very princely to behold, of heart couragious, politic in council, in adversity nothing abashed, in prosperity rather joyful than proud, in peace just and merciful, in war sharp and fierce, in the field bold and hardy and nevertheless no further than wisom would, adventurous. Whose wars, who so well consider, he shall no less command his wisdom where he voided than his manhood where he vanquished.

He was of visage lovely, of body mighty, strong and clean-made; howbeit in his latter days with over-liberal diet, somewhat corpulent and burly and nevertheless not uncomely; he was of youth greatly given to fleshly wantonness; from which health of body in great prosperity and fortune, without a special grace hardily refraineth. This fault not greatly grieved the people: for neither could any one man's pleasure stretch and extend to the displeasure of very many, and was without violence, and over that in his latter days, lessened and well left.

#### NOTES

(1) **King Edward IV** (1442-1483), a Yorkist, imprisoned King Henry VI in 1460 and proclaimed himself king the following year, when still 18 years of age. Taken prisoner during a Lancastrian insurrection in 1469, he was soon released and at once led an army against the rebels, defeating them in 1470. Henry died, probably by violence, in May 1471, his son and heir having been killed at Tewkesbury a few weeks earlier. Edward imprisoned and murdered his own brother, George, Duke of Clarence, in 1478 (a crime which Shakespeare attributes to the youngest brother, Duke of Gloucester, later Richard III).

Edward IV's lascivious escapades were notorious. He secretly married the widow of Sir John Grey, Elizabeth Woodville, who gave him two sons, Edward and Richard. One of his mistresses, less infamous than Jane Shore, was the Lady Elizabeth Lucy, probably the mother of his illegitimate children, Arthur and Elizabeth, who were born about the time of his secret marriage to Elizabeth Woodville. "How much truth, if any, there was in the story of Edward's seduction by means of a promise of marriage, of Lady Eleanor Butler, daughter of the late Earl of Shrewsbury, which was told after his death by Robert Stillington and used with such dire effect against his children by the Duke of Gloucester, it is impossible to say" (C.L. Scofield, II, 161).

### 28. "King Richard III "

[From *The History of King Richard the Third* ; Works, p. 37a]

Richard, the third son, of whom we now entreat, was in wit and courage equal with either of

them<sup>1</sup>, in body and prowess far under them both, little of stature, ill-featured of limbs, crookbacked, his left shoulder much higher than his right, hard-favored of visage, and such as is in states called warly<sup>2</sup> in other men, otherwise. He was malicious, wrathful, envious, and from afore his birth, ever froward.<sup>3</sup> It is for truth reported that the Duchess his mother<sup>4</sup> had so much ado in her travail that she could not be delivered of him uncut, and that he came into the world with the feet forward, as men be born outward; and (as the same fame runneth) also not untoothed: whether men of hatred report above the truth, or else that nature changed her course in his beginning, which in the course of his life many things unnaturally committed.

## NOTES

**King Richard III** (1452-1485), Duke of Gloucester, was brother to King Edward IV and to George, Duke of Clarence. He assisted the king in his struggle against the Lancastrians and is reported to have killed the son and heir of Henry VI, and even to have murdered King Henry himself. In 1473 he married Anne, the widow of the murdered prince. After King Edward's death he was left in charge of young Prince Edward during his minority, but he seized the boy's uncles, the Lords Rivers and Grey, and took the child under his personal protection. Richard's climb to power and the invidious methods presumably employed by him and his agent, the Duke of Buckingham, were made famous by More (see below, Nos. 36 and 37) and dramatized by Shakespeare (compare the vivid if pathetic self-portraits of the Duke of Gloucester in *The Third Part of King Henry the Sixth*, Act II, scene II, lines 152-161 [Nature was bribed to shrink up his arm like a withered shrub, make an envious mountain on his back; deformity mocks his body with legs of unequal size; he is disproportionate in every part]; and Act V, scene VI, lines 69-83 [He came into the world with "legs forward;" he should snarl and bite and play the dog; his body is shaped crooked]; and in the opening scene of *The Tragedy of King Richard Third*, lines 14-30 [Gloucester, now King Richard III, again in soliloquy, laments he is not shaped for sportive tricks, but is rudely stamped, curtailed of fair proportion, cheated of feature, deformed, unfinished, sent before his time; so lame and unfashionable that dogs bark at him as he limps by them; and once again he affirms that since he cannot prove a lover he is determined to prove a villain.])

## 29. "Jane Shore"

[From *The History of King Richard the Third*; Works, pp. 56b-57a]

This woman was born in London, worshipfully friended, honestly brought up, and very well married, saving somewhat too soon; her husband an honest citizen, young and goodly and of good substance. But for as much as they were coupled ere she were well ripe, she not very fervently loved, for whom she never longed, which was happily the thing that the more easily made her incline unto the King's<sup>5</sup> appetite when he required her. Howbeit, the respect of his royalty, the hope of gay apparel, ease, pleasure and other wanton wealth, was able soon to pierce a soft tender heart. But when the King had abused her, anon her husband (as he was an honest man and one that could his good, not presuming to touch a King's concubine) left her up to him altogether.

When the King died, the Lord Chamberlain took her. Which in the King's day, albeit he was sore enamoured upon her, yet he forbore her, either for reverence, or for a certain friendly faithfulness. Proper she was, and fair: nothing in her body that you would have changed, but if you would have wished her somewhat higher. Thus say they that knew her in her youth. Albeit some that now see her (for yet she liveth) deem her never to have been well visaged, whose judgment seemeth me somewhat like, as though men should guess the beauty of one long before departed, by her scalp taken out of the charnel house: for now is she old, lean, withered, and dried up, nothing left but riveled skin and hard bone. And yet being even such—who so well advise her visage might guess and devise which parts how filled would make it a fair face—yet delighted not men so much in her beauty, as in her pleasant behaviour. For a proper wit had she, and could both read well and write, merry in company, ready and quick of answer, neither mute nor full of babble, sometimes taunting without displeasure and not without disport.

The King would say that he had 3 concubines, which in three diverse properties diversely excelled: One the merriest; another the wiliest; the third the holiest harlot in his realm: as one whom no man could get out of the church lightly to any place, but it were to his bed. The other two were somewhat greater personages and nevertheless of their humility content to be nameless, and to forbear the praise of those properties. But the merriest was this Shore's wife, in whom the King therefore took special pleasure. For many he had, but her he loved, whose favor (to say the truth, for sin it were to belie the devil) she never abused to any man's hurt, but to many a man's comfort and relief. Where the King took displeasure, she would mitigate and appease his mind; where men were out of favor, she would bring them in his grace; for many that had highly offended, she obtained pardon. Of great forfeitures she got men remission. And finally, in many weighty suits, she stood many men in great stead, either for none, or very small, rewards; and those rather gay than rich: either for that she was with the deed [it-] self well done, or for that she delighted to be sued unto, and to show what she was able to do with the King, or for that wanton women and wealthy be not always covetous.

I doubt not some shall think this woman too sleight a thing to be written of and set among the remembrances of great matters: which they shall specially think that happily shall esteem her only by that they now see her. But meseemeth the chance so much the more worthy to be remembered, in how much she is now in the more beggerly condition, unfriended and worn out of acquaintance, after good substance, after as great favor with the prince, after as great suit and seeking \*, too, with all those that those days had business to speed, as many other men were in their times, which be now famous, only by the infamy of their ill deeds. Her doings were not much less, albeit they be much less remembered, because they were not so evil. For men use if they have an evil turn to write it in marble: and who so doth us a good turn, we write it in dust, which is not worst proved by her: for at this day she beggeth of many at this day living that at this day had begged, if she had not been.

## NOTES

(1) **Jane Shore** (rather, Elizabeth Shore), the daughter of a London merchant, married William Shore, a London dealer in textiles. She formed a liaison with King Edward IV in the latter part of his reign and remained his mistress until his death, after which she became the mistress of Lord Thomas Grey. In 1483 Richard III accused his dead brother's mistress of sorcery, and he had her

imprisoned. She was released, and, according to Sir Thomas More, became a beggar, bereft of her former beauty. She died impoverished. The Duke of Buckingham in his oration at the London Guildhall (see no. 36) echoes Richard's disgust for her when he refers to her as "a vile and abominable strumpet." More, however, although he hardly approved of her somewhat lascivious ways, writes sympathetically of her in her old age and dire straits. Her tragic story was first retold in the 1563 edition of the popular *The Mirror for Magistrates* (ed., L. Campbell, pp. 373-386). Jane Shore was alive though impoverished at the time More was writing his *History of Richard III* (ca. 1513). She was about seventy years of age when she died (ca. 1527). Further details by More of Jane Shore's characters are added to this passage in a Latin version of his *History of Richard III* ("The College of Arms Ms. Arundel 43"): "...no one better than she at enlivening a party, or at cheering up sad faces in a suitable manner; or at increasing happiness, sporting all the time with jests and witty sayings, yet never causing anyone pain, and usually making them laugh" (trans., R.S. Sylvester, <sup>2</sup> II, 231). More's account of Jane Shore influenced later writers, especially Thomas Churchyard ("Shore's Wife"), a play, and Anthony Chute ("Shore's Wife"), a descriptive poem. In *The Tragedy of King Richard the Third*, Shakespeare refers to Jane Shore in six different passages, of which two are of substantial interest: I, i. 93-94, where Gloucester points out that "Shore's wife hath a pretty foot, A cherry lip, a bonny eye, a passing pleasing tongue"; and in III.iv. 73-75, where he calls her "that harlot strumpet Shore" who with King Edward's wife by their "witchcraft" have "marked me". It is a lesson in dramaturgy to see how Shakespeare exploited his source. Nicholas Rowe, the first modern editor of Shakespeare, sympathetically portrayed Jane in his play, *The Tragedy of Jane Shore* (1714).

(2) **"...he had three concubines"**: Sylvester (*Wolsey*, p. 231), suggests that Edward's two concubines alluded to in this passage but not named were possibly Lady Eleanor Butler, "the wiliest," and Elizabeth Lucy, "the holiest."

Usually situated in church crypts, or as separate buildings in the churchyards, **Charnel Houses** were storage places for human bones dug up to provide space for new burials. There was a famous depository on the north side of St. Paul's churchyard from which more than a thousand cartloads of bones were taken at its dissolution.

### 30. "The Sultan of Syria"

[From *A Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation*; Works, p. 1229b]

[Vincent] "What surety can a man have of such a great prince but his promise, which for his own honor it can not become him to break?"

[Anthony] "I have known him and his father afore him, too, break more promises than five, as great as this is that he should here make with you, who shall come and cast it in his teeth, and tell him it is a shame for him to be so fickle and so false of his promise. And then what careth he for those words that he wotteth well he shall never hear? Not very much, although they were told him, too. If you might come after and complain your grief unto his own person yourself, you should find him as shamefast as a friend of mine, a merchant, found once the Sultan of Syria, to whom, being certain years about his merchandise in that country, he gave a great sum of money

for a certain office meet for him there for the while. Which he scant had him granted and put in his hand but that ere ever it was aught worth unto him, the Sultan suddenly sold it to another of his own sect, and put our Hungarian out. Then came he to him and humbly put him in remembrance of his grant passed [from] his own mouth and signed with his own hand. Whereunto the Sultan answered him with a grim countenance, "I will thou wit it, losel <sup>16</sup>, that neither my mouth nor mine hand shall be master over me to bind all my body at their pleasure. But I will so be Lord and master over them both that whatsoever the one say or the other write I will be at mine own liberty to do what me list myself and ask them both no leave. And therefore go get thee hence out of my countries, knave!"

### 31. "The Savage Turk"

[From *A Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation* ; Works, pp. 1212a-b]

[Anthony] "But as for those Christian countries that he <sup>14</sup> useth not for only tributaries (as he doth Chios, Cyprus, or Candia <sup>15</sup>) but reckoneth for clear conquest and utterly taketh for his own (as Morea <sup>16</sup>, Greece and Macedonia), and such other like; and as I verily think he will Hungary, if he get it: in all those useth he Christian people after sundry fashions. He letteth them dwell there indeed because they were too many to carry all away, and too many to kill them all, too, but if he should either leave the land dispeopled and desolate or else some other countries of his own from whence he should (which would not well be done) convey the people thither to people that land with all. There, lo, those that will not be turned from their faith (of which God keepeth—lauded be His Holy Name—very many), he suffereth to dwell still in peace, but yet is their peace for all that not very peaceable.

For lands he suffereth them to have none of their own; office or honest room they bear none. With occasions of his wars, he pilleth <sup>14</sup> them with taxes and tallages <sup>15</sup> unto the bare bones. Their children he chooseth where he list in their youth and taketh them from their parents, conveying them whither he list, where their friends never see them after, and abuseth them as he list: some young maidens [he] maketh harlots; some young men he bringeth up in war and some young children he causeth to be gelded—not their stones cut out, as the custom was of old, but [he] cutteth off their whole members by the body; how few escape and live, he little forceth, for he will have enough. And all that he so taketh young to any use of his own are betaken unto such Turks or false renegates <sup>16</sup> to keep [so] that they be turned from the faith of Christ, every one, or else so handled that as for this world they come to an evil cheving <sup>17</sup>.

For besides many other contumelies and despites that the Turks and the false renegade Christians many times do to good Christian people that still persevere and abide by the faith, they find the means sometimes to make some false shrews say that they heard such a Christian man speak opprobrious words against Mahomet. And upon that point falsely testified will they take occasion to compel him forsake the faith of Christ and turn to the profession of their shameful superstitious sect; or else will they put him unto death with cruel intolerable torments."

[Vincent] "Our Lord, Uncle, for his mighty mercy, keep those wretches hence! For, by my troth, if they hap to come hither, methinks I see many more tokens than one that we shall have of our

own folk here ready to fall in unto them. For like as before a great storm the sea beginneth sometimes to work and roar in itself ere ever the winds wax boistrous, so methinks hear at mine ear some of our own here among us which within these few years could no more have born the name of a Turk than the name of the devil begin now to find little fault therein; yea, and some [there are], to praise them too little, and little as they may, more glad to find faults at every state of Christendom--priests, princes, rites, ceremonies, sacraments, laws and customs spiritual, temporal, and all."

## NOTES

(1) **The Savage Turk:** During More's youth there were many reports in England of the cruelty of Turks, especially of their Sultans, and in particular Selim I ("The Grim") who had a brother and five nephews strangled and a host of other Turks beheaded or hanged; and who ordered the massacre of 40,000 Shiite Moslem "heretics". The expression "Mayest thou be Selim's Vezir" implied "Strike you dead" ( Kinross, p. 167). During the sixteenth century, beginning with the reign of Suleiman the Magnificent in 1520, stories of Turkish cruelty were popular in Europe, especially in the drama, but, except for the Sultan's personal behavior, may have been somewhat exaggerated. At least Robert Crowley, in 1550, comments that a traveller he met who visited "the heathens" in Turkey had seen "none such cruelty" ( *One and thyrtye Epigrammes* , sig. A8 v ). It is true that children were taken from their remote homelands (a practice called *Devshirme* ), but many of these children became the ablest of Ottoman generals and administrators. Except for galley rowers, slaves were used primarily as personal bodyguards and servants, especially the elite corps of paid infantry called the *Janissaries* . Real or imagined stories of Turkish cruelty did not prevent the English from buying Turkish goods. Bishop Hugh Latimer, a contemporary of More, chastizes the women of his congregation for their French hoods and their caps or bonnets of velvet "far-fetched, dear bought" from Turkey ( *Sermons* , ca. 1550, p. 217). (See also No. 82, Note 4)

## 32. "Of those who must act a Role"

[From *The History of King Richard the Third* ; Works. p. 66b]

For at the consecration of a Bishop, every man woteth well by the paying for his bulls <sup>is</sup> that he purposeth to be one, and <sup>is</sup> though he pay for nothing else. And yet must he be twice asked whether he will be bishop or no, and he must twice say "Nay," and at the third time take it as compelled thereunto by his own will. And in a stage play, all the people know right well that he that playeth the Soldan <sup>is</sup> is percase a souter <sup>is</sup> . Yet if one should can so little good to shew out of season what acquaintance he hath with him, and called him by his own name while he standeth in his majesty, one of his tormentors might hap to break his head—and worthy, for marring of the play. And so they said that these matters by Kings' games, as it were, stage plays, and for the more part played upon scaffolds, in which poor men be but the lookers-on. And they that wise be, will meddle no farther: for they that sometimes step up and play with them when they cannot play their parts, they disorder the play and do themselves no good.

## NOTES

(1) **at the third time take it as compelled thereunto by his own will** : Cf. *Julius Caesar* , I, ii,229-231: "... and he put it by thrice, every time gentler than other, and at every putting-by mine honest neighbours shouted."

(2) **And in a stage play** : The source of this image is found ultimately in Lucian's *Menippus*, a dialogue translated by More from Greek into Latin. The passage reads: "And when at length the play comes to an end, each of them strips off his gold-bespangled robe, lays aside his mask, steps out of his buskins, and goes about in poverty and humility..." (Loeb Classical Library, IV, 99-101). But More may have taken the *souter* (cobbler) player-image directly from his friend Erasmus' *Encomium Moriae* (In Praise of Folly), which was finished in 1509 while Erasmus visited with More. In Thomas Chaloner's translation (1549), Erasmus writes: "If one at a solemn stage play, would take upon him to pluck off the players' garments whiles they were saying their parts and so decipher unto the lookers-on the true and native faces of each of the players ...who before played the woman, should then appear to be a man ...who played God Almighty, should become a cobbler as he was before....So likewise all this life of moral men, what is it else, but a certain kind of stage play?" (sig. E3-E3 v ). An English verse translation of his Latin ( *Necromantia, a dialog of the poete Lucyan* ) was published by John Rastell ca. 1530.

(3) **Yet if one should can...with him** : i.e., try to derive some little benefit by inopportune revealing (on stage) that he personally knew the actor (who was playing the role of the Sultan).

<sup>1</sup> I.e., Richard's brothers, King Edward IV and George, Duke of Clarence

<sup>2</sup> Warlike

<sup>3</sup> Contrary

<sup>4</sup> I.e., Cecily Neville, Duchess of York

<sup>5</sup> I.e., Edward IV

<sup>6</sup> Kept away from

<sup>7</sup> Wrinkled

<sup>8</sup> Paying court

<sup>9</sup> *Cast..teeth* : reproach (him)

<sup>10</sup> Scoundrel

<sup>11</sup> *He* : i.e., the Turk

<sup>12</sup> Crete

<sup>13</sup> The Peloponnesus

<sup>14</sup> Strips, impoverishes

<sup>15</sup> Arbitrary taxes

<sup>16</sup> Deserters (from a faith)

<sup>17</sup> Bad ending

<sup>18</sup> Edicts

<sup>19</sup> I.e., even

<sup>20</sup> Sultan

<sup>21</sup> *percase a souter* : perhaps a cobbler