

LITERARY REFERENCES IN THE PASTON LETTERS TO THE  
CHARACTERS IN SHAKESPEARE'S KING HENRY VI, PART II

by

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## PURPOSE

No researcher can curb the genius of a great writer long enough to study it in detail. About the best that can be done is to study carefully what the genius had to work with and what he did with the material that he had at hand. We know, for example, that Shakespeare leaned pretty heavily upon the chronicle histories of Hall, Holinshed, and Grafton for the material utilized in his King Henry VI plays; it can not always be determined why he did what he did.

An equally interesting and perhaps equally profitable question concerns Shakespeare's dependability as a historian. Through a series of at least nine chronicle plays--King Richard II, King Henry IV, Parts I and II, King Henry V, King Henry VI, Parts I, II, and III, King Richard III, and King Henry VIII, not to mention King Lear, Macbeth, and Cymbeline--Shakespeare concerned himself with considerable blocks of English history. To what extent can Shakespeare be trusted as a historian? Does he show the proper respect for historical accuracy, or does he omit facts that might be prejudicial to the dramatic effects which he wished to produce? Does he ever willfully misquote history in order to achieve a dramatic effect?

In answering these questions, The Paston Letters furnish considerable pertinent data. The Paston Letters is a series of more than 1,000 pieces of correspondence between various members of the Paston family and their friends, over a period of eighty-six years, from 1417 to 1503. This correspondence, covering in all, four sizable volumes, is one of the most important original sources for the study of English history during the medieval period.

It is the purpose in this paper to study all of the references in The Paston Letters to the principal characters of King Henry VI, Part II, in order to test Shakespeare's historical accuracy in the very first chronicle play at which he tried his hand. It is generally admitted that the King Henry VI plays were Shakespeare's initial attempt at English chronicle history, perhaps the earliest of all his plays, and it is further generally admitted that King Henry VI, Part II, was written before King Henry VI, Part I.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> George Lyman Kittredge, The Complete Works of Shakespeare, p. 703.

# METHOD OF STUDY

In the present paper the same organization of the opposing factions as is presented in Shakespeare's King Henry VI, Part II, is followed; that is, personalities dealt with belonged either to Queen Margaret's party or to the party of the Lord Protector, Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester. The Queen's party--for varying motives--consisted of the Duke of Suffolk, the Duke of Somerset, and Cardinal Beaufort. The Lord Protector's party consisted essentially of the Earl of Salisbury and the Earl of Warwick. King Henry VI, because of his vacillating character, sometimes sided with the Queen, sometimes with the Lord Protector. The Duke of York, on the basis of political expediency, sometimes sided with the Lord Protector, sometimes with the Queen. Shakespeare aligns the Jack Cade rebellion with the York faction, although there is no mention of any such association in The Paston Letters.

The method in this study has been first to tabulate all the references throughout The Paston Letters to any of the principal characters in Shakespeare's King Henry VI, Part II, to determine how these characters were regarded by their contemporaries. Having determined the salient traits of each of the characters according to this original source, the contemporary portraits were compared with the portraits of the same characters as given by Shakespeare in order to determine Shakespeare's method of dealing with historical subject matter. In this manner it was sought to determine Shakespeare's dependability as a historian.

## THE PASTON FAMILY

Before going to a study of The Paston Letters proper, at least a few words on the Paston family itself seem to be in order. Who were the Pastons? Were they reputable people? Were they in a position to know personally or by reputation the important figures mentioned by Shakespeare in King Henry VI, Part II, and were they capable of passing judgment upon important public figures and important political issues of their day? In a word, are The Paston Letters worth anything as an original historical record?

At the time the family and their doings become best known, their social position was merely that of small gentry. William Paston, however, was a justice of the Common Pleas in the reign of Henry VI, whose uprightness of conduct caused him to be commonly spoken of by the name of "the Good Judge". He had a son, John, brought up to the law, who became executor to the old soldier and statesman, Sir John Fastolf. This John Paston had a considerable family, of whom the two eldest sons, strange to say, both bore the same Christian name as their father. They were also both soldiers, and each, in his time, attained the dignity of knighthood. Sir John Paston attended and did military service to Henry VI and also spent some little time as a member of King Edward's household. The second son, John, was placed in the service of the Duke of Norfolk. The letters of these two sons form a considerable part of the Paston correspondence.



Following the reign of Henry VI the fortunes of the Paston family prospered, and the descendants earned golden opinions of Henry VIII and Queen Elizabeth. Opinions were not always so golden, however. Here is a contemporary account of Clement Paston and of his son, William, the old judge in the days of Henry VI:

First, There was one Clement Paston dwelling in Paston, and he was a good, plain husband, and lived upon his land that he had in Paston, and kept thereon a plough all times in the year, and sometimes in barlysell two ploughs...Other livelode nor manors had he none there, (save five or six score acres of land) nor in none other place.

Also, the said Clement had a son William, which that he set to school, and often he borrowed money to find him to school; and after that he yede (went) to court with the help of Geoffrey Somerton, his uncle, and learned the law, and there begat he much good; and then he was made a serjeant, and afterwards made a justice, and a right cunning man in the law. And he purchased much land in Paston, and also he purchased the moiety of the fifth part of the manor of Bakton, called either Latymer's, or Styward's, or Huntingfield, which moiety stretched into Paston; and so with it, and with another part of the said five parts he hath seignory in Paston, but no manor place; and thereby would John Paston, son to the said William, make himself a lordship there, to the Duke of Lancaster's great hurt.<sup>2</sup>

William Paston left a name behind him of such repute that he was included by Fuller in his Worthies of England. It was not Fuller's usual practice to notice a lawyer in this work. The genealogy of the Paston family during the time covered by this research is given in the following chart.

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<sup>2</sup> James Gairdner, The Paston Letters, "Introduction", p. xxxv, Vol. IV. Hereafter, when reference is given to the four volumes of The Paston Letters, it will be designated in the footnotes by the number of the letter or "Introduction", page, and the volume number.





## THE WAR OF THE ROSES

Before The Paston Letters can be seen in their proper perspective a broad general outline of the War of the Roses should first be examined. The War of the Roses was not really a war between two rival houses, as is generally supposed, but a war between two factions of the same house. All of the claimants to the throne were descendants of one or another of the seven sons of Edward III.

Richard II was such a weakling that the people of England were more than ready to follow Henry Bolingbroke (Henry IV) even though they knew he was in part a usurper. As a son of John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, fourth son of Edward III, Henry IV had stepped in ahead of Edmund Mortimer, Earl of March, third son. During the brilliant and forceful reigns of Henry IV and Henry V England was not particularly concerned about the niceties of the succession, but as soon as it became evident to everyone that the weak Henry VI was incapable of governing, his doubtful right to the throne seemed to be the easiest way of bringing about a change.

Political order was a true and wholesome feeling in fifteenth century England, but under a king incapable of governing, this feeling bred a curse, not a blessing. The great lords who should have preserved order under the king fell out among themselves. In spite of the loyalty of the age, the greatest subjects almost of necessity became king-makers.

The time was ripe for taking what one could, for one by one the fruits of Henry V's brilliant conquests in France were lost. England was left in the hands of the boy, Henry VI, with Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, as

Protector. However, Duke Humphrey was cut down by intrigue, and the boy who was unable to punish his uncle's death became king. Mated to the inordinately ambitious Margaret of Anjou, he became the simple victim to her jealous intrigues. Pride, Jealousy, ambition, avarice, and hatred surrounded the throne while Henry VI moralized on nature.

Long had rancored the thwarted claim to the throne of the Yorkists, and Parliament compromised to right the royal succession and achieve a strong government. The House of Commons decreed that Henry VI should retain the right to occupy the throne during his life time, but at his death, succession should pass to the house of York.

Political intrigue still held sway, and the Duke of York was ordered to Ireland. Whether for his own protection at court or simply to satisfy ambitions, the Duke of York raised an army as he went.

While the Duke of York was in Ireland the Commons were demanding a change. Calling himself John Mortimer, cousin of the Duke of York, Jack Cade marched with his rabble into London, forcing Henry VI to flee for his life. The rebel was required to disguise himself, for he had been obliged to abjure the kingdom for murder. Historically there seems to be no justification for identifying York with the Cade Rebellion. After this incident many similar insurrections broke out in the land.

Upon York's return he marched to the royal presence in arms. Finally only war could be the result. York's forces took the field and were successful at the first battle of St. Alban's.

This outbreak could surely have been averted had Henry VI augmented the power and glory of his father, Henry V, who died at his height of greatness. Henry VI was cold in great affairs, and his supreme saintliness

consisted of remaining totally blameless whatever might befall his country or advisers. For fear of doing what was wrong, he shrunk from doing what was right.

What was Shakespeare's knowledge of this period with its controversial claims, dynamic lords, and weak king? In King Henry VI, Part II, Act II, scene ii, lines 9-22, the playwright demonstrated his learning when York says:

Then thus:  
 Edward the Third, my lords, had seven sons:  
 The first, Edward the Black Prince, Prince of Wales;  
 The second, William of Hatfield; and the third,  
 Lionel, Duke of Clarence; next to whom  
 Was John of Gaunt, the Duke of Lancaster;  
 The fifth was Edmund Langley, Duke of York;  
 The sixth was Thomas of Woodstock, Duke of Gloucester;  
 William of Windsor was the seventh and last.  
 Edward the Black Prince died before his father,  
 And left behind him Richard, his only son,  
 Who after Edward the Third's death, reign'd as king;  
 Till Henry Bolingbroke, Duke of Lancaster,  
 The eldest son and heir of John of Gaunt,  
 Crown'd by the name of Henry the Fourth,  
 Seiz'd on the realm, depos'd the rightful king,  
 Sent his poor queen to France, from whence she came,  
 And him to Pomfret; where as all you know,  
 Harmless Richard was murder'd traitorously.<sup>3</sup>

These lines of Shakespeare summarize the background for the War of the Roses between the so-called houses of York and Lancaster. By this means the era of authority of Henry IV and Henry V became turmoil in the reign of Henry VI.

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<sup>3</sup> The line of succession in The First Part of the Contention is badly garbled and historically inaccurate, but it was straightened out in the Quarto of 1619. However, Shakespeare again falls into an error in King Henry IV, Part I, concerning Edmund Mortimer, Earl of March.

It must be noted that William of Hatfield died without an heir. The third son, Duke of Clarence, had a daughter who married Edmund Mortimer, Earl of March. They had issue Roger, Earl of March, and thence descended Edmund, Anne, and Eleanor. The son, Edmund, laid claim to the crown, but he was kept in captivity until he died. Anne married Richard, Earl of Cambridge, who was son to Edmund Langley, Edward the Third's fifth son. Through her Richard Plantagenet, the Duke of York, laid claim to the throne.

This claim may have seemed a bold step, but it was a course of action suggested by the results of past experience. After ten miserable years of fluctuating policy, the Yorkists were in power for the fourth time (after the first battle of St. Alban's York was in power, and he was Protector during the King's illnesses in 1453 and 1455), but again they might be set aside and proclaimed traitors.

Admittedly Henry IV was a usurper, but his family had been in possession of the throne for three generations, so York's claim to set aside this family was questionable in some minds. Few of the lords at first appeared to regard it with favor. When it was presented in the Parliament, many stayed away. The Duke's counsel insisted upon an answer, and King Henry VI left it to the justices. The justices refused to commit themselves. The King's serjeants and attorney were then applied to but would give no answer. At length the lords brought to the floor of the House a compromise that the King should be allowed to retain his crown for life, and the succession would then revert to the

Duke of York and heirs. Margaret and her followers, however, would recognize nothing of what had transpired in Parliament. The Duke of York was once more to be Protector and have the actual government.

The Duke of York and the Earl of Salisbury went north to put down the rebellion of the Queen in 1461. The disastrous battle of Wakefield was fought and the Yorkists were defeated, the Duke and the Earl of Salisbury being slain in the field.

Within little more than two months after the battle of Wakefield, the son of the slain Duke was proclaimed Edward IV in London. He brought the Yorkists to the throne for a prolonged length of time from 1461-70 and again from 1472 to 1483. The leaders of the powerful Yorkist party included Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, because he opposed the Queen, the Duke of York, the Earl of Warwick, the Earl of Salisbury, and later the son of York, Edward IV.

With leadership divided among those strong enough to seize it, the result could only be conflict. The claim to the throne, which is held to be the primary cause of the War of Roses, is explained in the diagram following.

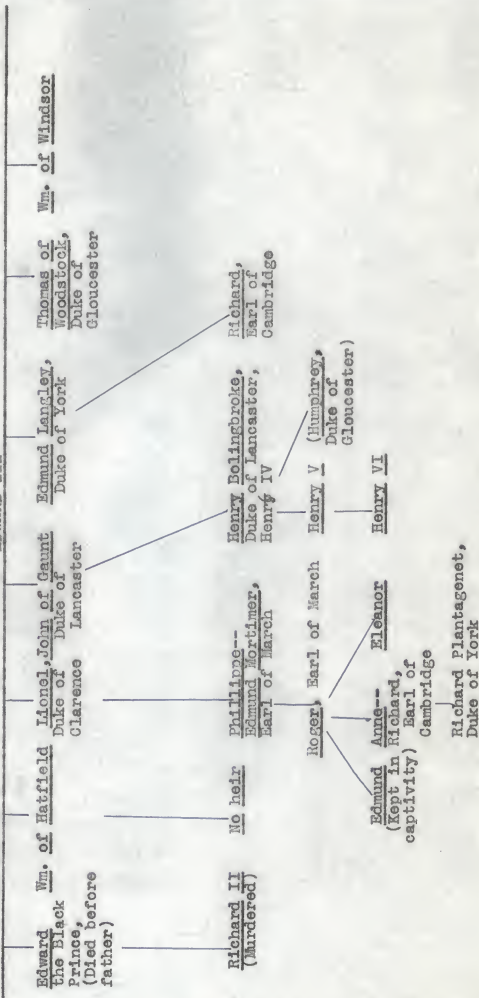
# GENEALOGY OF EDWARD III

As Given

by

Shakespeare

## EDWARD III





## THE LORD PROTECTOR FACTION

Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester

Heading the "Duke Humphrey Faction", Gloucester was practically the protagonist of the "tragical historical" chronicle, King Henry VI, Part II. Queen Margaret, of course, would be the antagonist.

In the play also the good Duke Humphrey was sharply contrasted with the King. His goodness was of more genuine quality, but he had a like defect of energy. He lamented the base forfeiture of national honor, which never gave the King concern, yet he did nothing worthy of his position to save it. He seemed incapable of coping with the Cardinal or of ruling or saving his wife. Yet he was more of a realist than Henry VI, for he saw through the "miracle" of healing of the imposter Simpcox and his wife. Humphrey unmasked the rogue and had him whipped to the anguish of the King.

Whether the concept was in his mind, or for dramatic reasons, Shakespeare thought of the Earl of Salisbury and Duke Humphrey as Elder Statesmen, and he thought of the Earl of Warwick as a romantic, daring, devil-may-care type of hero. However, in The Paston Letters the "Duke Humphrey Faction" did not always hold such exalted positions.

In both the play and the Paston correspondence Humphrey is shown as a man who would walk out on a conference to which he could not conscientiously subscribe. Shakespeare ignored one facet of the Duke's character, omitting all reference to the Lord Protector's relations with Jacqueline of Hainault and Eleanor Cobham. If the playwright had



included this evidence, he would have lost much of the sympathy for the Duke of Gloucester, so he erred by omission to build a stronger play.

Before preceeding to the references of the Duke of Gloucester's marriages in The Paston Letters, it must be noted that evidently none of the Pastons ever knew him personally. On the other hand, William Paston seemed to be under the influence of Cardinal Beaufort. The trial of the validity of Humphrey's marriage with Jacqueline of Hainault on the grounds that her former marriage was void by consanguinity is mentioned in one of William Paston's letters:

I have, after the advys of your lettre, deen dewely examyned the instrument of the wysest I coude fynde here, and in especial by on Maister Robert Sutton, a courtezane of the Court of Rome, the which is the chief and most chier man with my Lord of Gloucestre, and his matier in the said court for my lady, his wyff (Jacqueline of Hainault, whom Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, married, pretending that her former marriage with John, Duke of Brabant, was void by consanguinity. The question which of the two marriages was valid, was at this time before the Pope.); and here aunswere is that al this processe, though it were in dede proceded as the instrument specifisth, is not suffisant in the lawe of Holy Cherche, and that hem semyth, by the sight of the instrument and by the defautes (that) ye espled in the same and other, and in maner by the knowelech of the notarie, that the processe, in gret part ther of, is fal(se) (and) untrewe. I have taken advys of...and cha(uncellor) of my Lord of Wynchestre (Henry Beaufort, afterwards Cardinal)...<sup>4</sup>

The above letter seems to have been prompted by curiosity about a matter, which, no doubt, the English people were talking about. In The Paston Letters Eleanor Cobham, first the mistress and afterwards the wife of Humphrey, is also mentioned.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> William Paston to William Worsted, 7, pp. 24-25, Vol. I, March 1, 1426.

<sup>5</sup> Note to letter 92, p. 72, Vol. I.

During the time of Henry VI the Pastons applied to nobles whom they knew for assistance in legal matters. There was no evidence of such applications to the Duke of Gloucester, so the conclusion is that they had no influence with him or did not know him.

Shakespeare and The Paston Letters seemed to agree that the Duke of Gloucester did not always agree with the King and the lords. In the play he spoke against the King's marriage with Margeret of Anjou and the giving of a dowry to her. This disagreement with the marriage was not indicated in the Paston correspondence, but a similar matter was pointed out. Being the brother of Henry V, Humphrey resented any action sacrificing ground or men to the French. His attitude is shown in the following excerpt:

Salvete, etc. Tytyngs, the Duk of Orlyawnoe (Charles, Duke of Orleans, who was taken prisoner at the battle of Agincourt in 1415, and had never since been released) hath made his oath and upon the Sacrement, and usyd it, never for to bere armes ayenst Englund, in the presence of the Kyng and all the Lordes, except my Lord of Gloucestre. And proving my sayd Lord of Gloucestre agreyd never to hye delyveraunce, quan the masse began he toke his barge, etc.

From the evidence the reader can assume that Shakespeare ignored the marriages of the Duke of Gloucester to portray him as the "Good Duke". The play and The Paston Letters portray him as a competent Protector who would stand alone for what he believed, and in public life "Did bear him like a noble gentleman".

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<sup>6</sup> Robert Repps to John Paston, p. 40, Vol. I, November 1, 1440.

### EARL OF WARWICK

The times made strange bed-fellows in the party of the "Good Duke". These men were brought together to "bridle and suppress the pride of Suffolk and the cardinal" and to "cherish Duke Humphrey's deeds", while they tended the profit of the land. Thus, Shakespeare explained the bringing together of this political party. These two men, Duke Humphrey and the Earl of Warwick, were very popular with the people. Aside from that trait, Shakespeare drew a sharp contrast between them. As previously pointed out, Duke Humphrey was the Elder Statesman, Warwick the starry-eyed, romantic hero.

This observation draws a question of dramatic technique. Could the Earl of Warwick be a first draft of Hotspur in King Henry IV? Could Shakespeare have been experimenting with a hero who showed a stubborn love of justice to place the rightful heir on the throne with brilliant generalship? Both characters also had powerful fathers to help in the enterprise. The Earl of Warwick lacked the complete portrayal given Hotspur later. Examination of the two characters leads the researcher to believe this first draft to be a very strong possibility.

In King Henry VI, Part II, the Earl of Warwick is praised by his father, the Earl of Salisbury, as being famous for his deeds, plainness, and housekeeping. He mentioned, too, his generalship in France and his regency there where he enjoyed great popularity.

Letters in the Paston correspondence tend to point up these traits of the Earl of Warwick, showing him to be doubly ambitious, popular, and

successful, and not so much Shakespeare's devil-may-care hero. These traits made him famous as the "King-maker", after succeeding to the earldom in 1449.

The Paston Letters indicate that a "King-maker" or any lord had to be diplomatic and powerful to live during Henry VI's troubled reign. During the turmoil of 1450 Warwick took four hundred men with him at the convening of Parliament, obviously for protection.<sup>7</sup>

The blame for the first battle of St. Alban's was deflected by Warwick away from himself to Cromwell, possibly showing his diplomacy and ambition:

Amonges other mervell, ij. dayes afore the writyng of this letter, there was langage betwene my Lordes of Warrewikke and Cromwell afore the Kyng, in somuch as the Lord Cromwell wold have excused hym self of all the steryng or moevyng of the male journey of Seynt Albones; of the whiche excuse makyng, my Lord Warrewikke had knolege, and in hast wasse with the Kyng, and sware by his othe that the Lord Cromwell said not trouth, but that he was begynner of all that journey at Seynt Albones; and so betwene my said ij. Lords of Warrewikke and Cromwell ther is at this day grute grugyng, in somech as the Erle of Shrouesbury hath loged hym at the hospitall of Seynt James, beside the Mewe, be the Lord Cromwells desire, for his sauf gard.<sup>8</sup>

Led by Warwick, the Yorkist lords wrote to the authorities in Norfolk a manifesto,<sup>9</sup> stating their ambitions. By 1461 and 1462 Warwick's influence was predominant in the letters of the Pastons as to his whereabouts and activities:

The Lord Bourgeher is with the Kynge, and my Lord Warwyk still in the North, etc.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> John Crane to John Paston, 94, p. 127, Vol. I, May 6, 1450.

<sup>8</sup> Henry Windsor to Bokkyng and Worcester, 253, p. 345, Vol. I, July 19, 1455.

<sup>9</sup> Manifesto, 353, p. 519, Vol. I, July 23, 1460.

<sup>10</sup> John Russe to John Paston, 409, p. 38, Vol. II, August 23, 1461.

Another reference:

As for tydyngs, my Lord of Warwyk yed forward in to Scotland as on Saturday (October 30) last past with xx<sup>m</sup> (20,000) men.<sup>11</sup>

Also written to John Paston was the following:

Item, sir, if please such tydyngs as I her of, I send you word. My Lord of Warwek hathe be in Skotland, an take a castell of the Skoots; and upon thys ther came the Quene of Skoots, (Margaret, mother to James III, King of Scotland) with other Lords of her contre, as ye shall her the namys, in basetry (embassy) to my seyed Lord of Warwek, and a trews is take betwyx thys and Seynt Bertylmew Day in August. Thes is the last tydyngs that I knowe.<sup>12</sup>

Here is yet another:

As for tydyngs, the Erles of Warrewyk, of Essex, Lord Wenlok, Bysshop of Dereham, and other go in to Scotland of inbassat.<sup>13</sup>

Warwick was ambitious, too, in negotiations for private land:

Has spoken with Warwyk and Stwkle for the place and lands in Arleham. Declined their offer of six d. an acre, they keeping the place in repair; but Stwkle has promised all the lands shall be purveyed for, as for this year. Warwyk this day offered my mother 7 d. an acre for the lands in Arleham, but I counselled her to hold out for a longer term.<sup>14</sup>

Sometimes, however, he "negotiated" under questionable circumstances and was very practical:

Place it you to undyrstande the grete necessaryte of my wrytyng to you is this, that ther was made an exchange be the graunsyre of my hosbonds Mundeford, un hose sowle God have mercy, of the maner of Estlexham, the qwych is perte of my juntor, and my grauntfadyr Mundeford recoveryd the said maner of Estlexham be assyze (note) a guyne the aunsetrys of Rows, and so madyt clere; and nowe have Edmund Rows claymyt the seyed maner of Estlexham be the verteu of a tayle (an entail), and hathe takyn possesseon, and made a feffement to

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<sup>11</sup>John Paston to John Paston, Sr., 463, p. 120, Vol. II, November 1, 1462.

<sup>12</sup>J. Daubeney to John Paston, 452, p. 108, Vol. II, July 3, 1462.

<sup>13</sup>Thomas Playter to John Paston, 458, p. 110, Vol. II, July, 1462.

<sup>14</sup>Abstract, John Paston, Jr., to his father, John Paston, 545, p. 264, Vol. II.



my Lord of Warewyke (Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick) and Water George, and to Curde. And un Fryday be for Seynt Walentyne is Day Water George, and Curde enteryd and toke possessyon for my seyde Lord of Warwyke, and so bothe the forseyd manerys were entayled, and at the tyme of the exchange made the tayles and evydens of bothe for seyde manerys were delyvered un to the partyes indeferently be the avyse of men lernyd.<sup>15</sup>

However, he also defended the rights of others:

And, sir, as for the place of Attylbrigge that my moder in lawe now duellith in, sir, you maistership shal right not (naught) attempte ther now in for my Lorde of Warwik (Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick) hath seen how the same place was yeven me by testament by Sir Roger Dallyng after the disease of my fader, whiche is redy to be shewed. And thereupon my Lorde of Warwik hath comaunded certeyn gentilmen to entre in the same place, and your maistership hadde be moved ther in or this, but for cause that ye love wel Lammour, and that my moder in lawe is his sister; but I knowe wel hit woul cost CCCLi., but that she shal be dispossedded of that place in short tyme.<sup>16</sup>

Like many of the other noblemen, he was forced to borrow money occasionally, as he wrote to Sir Thomas Todenham about 1449.<sup>17</sup> This loan should occasion little surprise, for the great Earl of Warwick entertained lavishly in the style of the Middle Ages, and sometimes at his table the flesh of six entire oxen was consumed in a single meal. He entertained all chance comers who had any acquaintance with his household. Visitors were also allowed to carry off joints from his table, and the taverns in the neighborhood of Warwick's inn were actually full of his meat.<sup>18</sup> Shakespeare and Warwick's contemporaries seemed to be in complete agreement as to his housekeeping.

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<sup>15</sup>Elizabeth Mundeford to John Paston, 433, p. 80, Vol. II, 1461.

<sup>16</sup>Roger Taverham to John Paston, 424, p. 68, Vol. II, 1461(?).

<sup>17</sup>73, p. 94, Vol. I.

<sup>18</sup>"Introduction", p. ccclxxv, Vol. IV.

Being such a popular man of business, he was made a patron in the founding of Fastolf's college.<sup>19</sup> His influence was also important in other civil matters,<sup>20</sup> and his former soldiers used the prestige of his name for assistance.<sup>21</sup>

Right wurshipfull and myn especiall good maister, I recomaund me to yow with all my service, besachyng you hortily, at the reverence of God, to helpe me now in the grettest extremite that I cam at sith my greet trobil with Ingham. It is not eute of your remembraunce how Twyer in Norff(olk) vexith me bothe by noise and serchyng myn house for me, so that theer I can not be in quyete; and all that, I am verily acerteined, is by Heydens craftt. And heer in the Kyngs house ammenst Howard, wher I had hopid to a'relevid myself, I am supplanted and cast oute from hym by a clamour of all his servaunts at onys, and ne wer oonly that his disposicion accordyth not to my pouer conceyte, which maketh me to gif lesse force, be cause I desire be used, ellis by my trouth this unhappy unkyndeness wold I trow a'killed me. I pray yow, at the reverence of Jesu Criste to enfourme my Lord of Warwyk of me. Parde I haf do hym service; I was with hym at Northampton, that all men knew; and now agayn at Seynt Albones, that knowth James Ratcliff; and ther lost I xxli wurth horse, herneys, and mony, and was hurte in diverse places. I pray yow to gete me his good Lordship, and that I may be toward hym in Norffolk in his Courts holdyng, or ellis, if any thyng he haf to do; and that ye wole gete me a letter to Twyer to late me to sit in rest.

As shown by history, Warwick was usually a man to defend his friends, but when he felt wronged, he did not hesitate to act, as when he sought to unseat Edward IV after a confidence was betrayed. Here was a man bold of speech and action. In 1460 he showed this boldness after the capture of Lord Rivers and son:

As for tydynge, my Lord Ryvers was brought to Caley, and by for the Lords with viij<sup>xx</sup> (8 score) torches, and there my Lord of Salesbury reheted (rated) hym, calling hym knaves son, that he schuld be so rude to calle hym and these other Lords traytors, for they schall be found the Kyngs trewe liege men, whan he schuld be found a traytor, etc. And my Lord of Warrewyk rehetyd hym, and seyed that his fader was but a squyer, and broute up with Kyng Herry the Vte and sethen hymself made

<sup>19</sup>Fastolf's Will, 337, p. 491, Vol. I.

<sup>20</sup>Roger Taversham to John Paston, 424, p. 68, Vol. II.

<sup>21</sup>Thomas Denyes to John Paston, 389, pp. 10-11, Vol. II, May, 1461.



by maryage, and also made Lord, and that it was not his parte to have swyche langage of Lords, beyng of the Kyngs blood. And my Lord of Marche reheted hym in lyke wyse. And Sir Antony (Lord Scales) was reheted for his langage of all iij Lords in lyke wyse.<sup>22</sup>

This very boldness was evidently one of the qualities to win the hearts of the people, for he was obviously popular whether he was in or out of favor with the Throne. After the dispersion of York's army near Ludlow in October, commissions were granted to persons to arrest and punish his adherents. Here is one reaction:

A lewde (illiterate) doctor of Ludgate perchid on Soneday fourteenyts at Powlys, chargyng the peple that no man schuld preyen for these Lord traytorys, etc. (Earls of March, Warwick, Salisbury)<sup>23</sup>

In 1460 other correspondence followed to show his remaining popularity:

Ther is gret talkyng in thys contre of the desyr of my Lorde of York. (His claim to the throne). The pepyll reporte full worchepfully of my Lord of Warwyk.<sup>24</sup>

A further comment:

God save our good Lords, Warwik, alle hise brether, Salisbury, etc., fro al fals covetyse and favour of extorcyon, as they wil fle uttyr schame and confusyon. God save hem, and preserve fre tresen and poyson; lete hem be war her of for the pite of God; for yf owt come to my Lord Warwik but good, far weel so, far weel I, and al our frends, for be the weye of my sowle, this lond wer uttirly on done, as God forbede.<sup>25</sup>

The following excerpts need no other explanation, for the people

"lovyth and dredyth hym (Norfolk) more than any other lord except the Kyng and my Lord of Warwyk, etc".<sup>26</sup> "And it is seyde that the Kyng shuld be at London as on Satyrday or Sonday long past, and men deme that he wold to Caleyse hym selfe; for the soudyors are so wyld there, that they wyll not

<sup>22</sup> William Paston to John, 346, p. 506, Vol. I, January 28, 1460.

<sup>23</sup> Friar Brackley to John Paston, 341, p. 497, latter part of 1459, Vol. I.

<sup>24</sup> Margaret Paston to John, 361, p. 532, Vol. I, October 21, 1460.

<sup>25</sup> Friar Brackley to John Paston, 355, pp. 521-2, Vol. I, October, 1460.

<sup>26</sup> Margaret Paston to John, 534, p. 252, Vol. II, October 27, 1465.

lette in ony man but the Kynge or my Lord Warwyk."<sup>27</sup>

The cause of York and Warwick was joined, and both enhanced the popularity of the other:

Ye may tell my Lorde of Yorke that it is open in every mamys mouth in this contre the language that my Lorde of Yorke and my Lord of Warwik had to my Lorde of Norfolk in the Kings chambre, and that my Lorde of Yorke saide, rathir than the londe shulde go so, he wolde com dwell ther hym selff. Ye wolde mervaille what harts my Lorde hath gotten and how this language put people in comforte.<sup>28</sup>

Warwick, too, was a favorite of Edward IV. In 1462 there was evidence in the correspondence of an invitation for an audience with the King,<sup>29</sup> and again in 1469.<sup>30</sup> He was also with the King in 1470.<sup>31</sup>

His popularity with royalty or commoners may have partly accounted for his success, but one of the most important factors was his military strategy, as at the battle of St. Alban's:<sup>32</sup>

Thys don, the fore seyde Lord Glyfford kept strongly the barrers that the seyde Duke of York myght not in ony wise, with all the power that he hadde, entre ne broke into the toun. The Erie of Warrewyk, knowyng ther offe, toke and gadered his men to gedere and ferously brake in by the gardeyne sydes betuene the signe of the Keye and the sygne of the Chekkere in Holwell strete; and anon as they wer wyth inne the toon, sodeynly the blew up trumpettes, and sette a cry with asshout and a grete voyce, 'A Warrewe! A Warrewyk! A Warrewyk!' and into that tyme the Duke of York mygth nevere have entre into the toun; and they with strong hond kept yt, and myghttly faught to gedere, and anon, forth with after the brekyng in, they sette on them manfully.

Shakespeare gave the glory for winning the first battle at St. Alban's to the Duke of York. Men of that day, however, gave the credit to the Earl of Warwick. Both King Henry VI, Part II, and The Paston Letters declare that

<sup>27</sup> John Russe to John Paston, 462, p. 118, Vol. II, 1462.

<sup>28</sup> Anonymous to Sir John Paston, 591, p. 325, Vol. II, October 28, 1468.

<sup>29</sup> 460, pp. 112-13, Vol. II, September, 1462.

<sup>30</sup> 615, p. 361, Vol. II, July 9, 1469.

<sup>31</sup> Sir John Paston to John Paston, 637, pp. 394-5, Vol. II, March, 1470.

<sup>32</sup> The Battle of St. Alban's, 239, p. 330, May 21-22, Vol. I, 1455.

principal changes were made following the battle of St. Alban's. In a letter to John Paston the changes are mentioned, "My Lord of Yorke, Constabil of Englande; my Lord of Warweke is made captayn of Calyes; my Lord Burghier is made Treaserer of Englande; and as yit other tydinges have I none".<sup>33</sup>

When the Earl of Warwick was given charge of the seas, he was not always successful; however, he was still a favorite with the people. He was beaten by the Spanish during a battle in 1458.<sup>34</sup> Six years before this battle his ship had also suffered damage.<sup>35</sup>

All of the enemies were not foreign, as John Paston, the youngest, wrote:

Item, my brother is redy(n) to Yarmowth for the lette brybers that wold a robbed a ship undyr color of my Lord of Warwyk, and longe nothyng to hem ward.<sup>36</sup>

And some of the enemies were other noblemen, jealous of the sea power of Warwick. The Lord of Excester was particularly displeased.<sup>37</sup>

In a letter of 1462 his success is shown to stem partly from his conscientious attitude while in command:

My Lord of Warwyk lythe at the castyll of Warcoorthe, but iij myle out of Alnewyk, and he rydyth dayly to all thes castelys for the overse the segys; and if they want vataylys, or any othyr thyng, he is redy to pervey it for them to hys power.<sup>38</sup>

In spite of the factors which made him popular and successful by siding with York, he made himself unpopular with the opposing Lancastrians, as illustrated in these two letters:

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<sup>33</sup>John Crane to John Paston, 241, p. 334, Vol. I, May 25, 1455.

<sup>34</sup>John Jernyngham to Margaret Paston, 817, pp. 428-9, Vol. I, June 1, 1458.

<sup>35</sup>John Russe to John Paston, 462, p. 117, Vol. II, 1462.

<sup>36</sup>John Paston, youngest, to---, 384, p. 4, Vol. II, 1461.

<sup>37</sup>John Beeking to Sir John Fastolf, 315, pp. 426-7, Vol. I, March 14, 1458.

<sup>38</sup>John Paston, youngest, to John Paston, elder, 464, p. 121, Vol. II, 1462.

The Erles of Warwyk, Richemond (Edmund Tudor, King's half brother), and Pembroke (half brother to the King) comen with the Duke of Yorke, as it is seide, everych of theym with a godely feliship. And natheles th'erle of Warwyk wole have M<sup>n</sup> men awaityng on hym beside the feliship that cometh with hym, as ferre as I can knowe. And as Geffrey Poole seithe the Kynges bretherne ben like to be arrested at their comyng to Londone, yf thei come.<sup>39</sup>

The other letter refers also to military planning:

I schuld go to Castre, and a man of my Lordes Norfolk told here he came fro London, and there he had commonly voysid that the Duke of Norfolk schuld be the Kynges comaundement kepe hise Esterne at Castre for safe gard of the cuntre ayens Warwyk and other swich of the Kinges enmyes which may lytely be lyklynesse aryve at Waxham, etc.<sup>40</sup>

For strategy military or political the times demanded clever men, and there seemed to be few. Richard Neville was not only diplomatic and clever but popular and successful. According to the Paston correspondence he was successful militarily, politically, and financially. As in King Henry VI, Part II, he was famous for his deeds, plainness, and housekeeping. It was more than a romantic, daring hero, however, who in 1470 governed for a half-year in the name of the King whom he was a principal agent in deposing ten years before. The lack of complete character portrayal for Warwick on Shakespeare's part may have been due to experimentation. It must be reiterated that probably Warwick was the first draft of Hotspur.

In closing, the reader may judge the Earl of Warwick for himself, as Warwick wrote in his own forthright manner:

Worshipfull and my right trusty and welbeloved frende, I grete you well, and forasmuch as I have purchased of the worshipfull and my welbeloved frende, Priour of Walsyngham, iiij maners in Lityl Snoryng, with the appurtenants, in the Counte of Norffolk, which maners be eleted Bowles and Walcotes,--I desir and hertily praye yow, that ye well shewe to me, and my feoffes in my name, your good will and favour, so that I may by your frendship the more peaseably rejoy my forsaied purchase.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>39</sup>Newsletter of John Stodeley, 195, p. 266, Vol. I, January 19, 1454.

<sup>40</sup>Friar Brackley to (William Paston), 349, p. 514, Vol. I, before Easter, 1460.

<sup>41</sup>Earl of Warwick to John Paston, 313, p. 299, Vol. I, August 23, 1454.

# QUEEN MARGARET'S FACTION

## Queen Margaret

Historically, the Lancastrians were in the role of defenders. They had the throne, whether rightly or wrongly, and they imprisoned or murdered all other aspirants. They kept Edmund, son of Roger the Earl of March, in prison. Henry V executed the father of the Duke of York for treason. Margaret of Anjou, wife of Henry VI, was the primary Lancastrian leader for the sake of her son. She even went into the field to command troops. For her aid she employed the Duke of Suffolk, and at his death, the Duke of Somerset.

The final outcome was that with the death of Henry VI's son hope was lost for his line. Henry VI was murdered; and the Queen was driven back to her homeland by Edward IV.

In King Henry VI, Part II, Shakespeare painted her as energetic, violent, thoroughly unfeminine, and passionate. He always gave his heroines some saving grace, but obviously there was only one for her, and that was her mother love. Shakespeare makes her an adulteress, which seems reasonable in the light of her character. Dynamic and forceful as she was, she still was not heroic and gets little or no respect and sympathy from the reader.

Just as the Earl of Warwick might be a first draft of Hotspur, so Queen Margaret might be a first draft for Lady Macbeth. She was a strong woman, married to a weak husband, who saw that if she were to have a successor to follow in the footsteps of his father, he must be made in truth a real king. Yet Margaret did not have the majesty of Lady Macbeth, but she could be a pattern perfected later by Shakespeare for his great



tragedy, Macbeth.

In The Paston Letters Margaret is portrayed no more flatteringly than in the play. She is shown to be an ambitious woman who would go to any length in order to rule--even to treason, a fact apparently unknown to Shakespeare and his immediate sources. Gairdner pointed out this treasonable event as of 1457;

Notwithstanding the commissions issued to keep watch upon the coasts, the French managed to surprise and plunder Sandwich. On Sunday, the 28th August, a large force under the command of Pierre de Breze, seneschal of Normandy, landed not far from the town, which they took and kept possession of during the entire day. A number of the inhabitants, on the first alarm, retreated on board some ships lying in the harbour, from whence they began presently to shoot at the enemy. But De Breze having warned them if they continued he would burn their ships, they found it prudent to leave off. Having killed the bailiffs and principal officers, the Frenchmen carried off a number of wealthy persons as prisoners, and returned to their ships in the evening, laden with valuable spoils from the town and neighbourhood.

The disaster must have been keenly felt; but if Englishmen had known the whole truth, it would have been felt more keenly still. Our own old historians were not aware of the fact, but an early French chronicler who lived at the time assures us that the attack had been purposely invited by Margaret of Anjou out of hatred to the Duke of York, in order to make a diversion, while the Scots should ravage England! It was well for her that the truth was not suspected.<sup>1</sup>

In the light of the above evidence how ironic that Henry VI obviously hoped to secure an honorable peace for both England and France when he married Margaret of Anjou, niece of the King of France's consort! The cost of the marriage--no dowry and the loss of Anjou and Maine--seems to suggest a policy of peace at any price. However, in promoting this union, the Duke of Suffolk was trying to ally the weak king with a woman of stronger will than Henry's own.

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<sup>1</sup>"Introduction", pp. cxviii-ix, Vol. IV.

When Margaret first came to England, the people at large rejoiced, for she was beautiful and attractive, even if poor. The negotiator received the thanks of Parliament, and there was not a man in all the kingdom--at least in all Parliament--durst wag his tongue in censure.<sup>2</sup> Some of that popularity remained, for she was often mentioned in the Paston correspondence.

Thus Margaret and Suffolk became the chief counsels for the indecisive king. Throughout her political career there was evidence of favoritism in the Court, and consequently favorites with King Henry VI. With the assassination of Suffolk, Somerset became her primary colleague, but throughout this period they were the powers of the Lancastrian party.

Obviously York was never a favorite of hers. She connived to keep York and the King separated in 1456, which may have been partly responsible for the civil strife. Her procedure is mentioned below:

In consequence of the Duke of York's popularity in London, it was expedient to remove the king some distance from the capital. He appears to have been staying at Windsor during July and the beginning of August. In the middle of the latter month he took his departure northwards. By the dates of his Privy Seals we find him to have been at Wycombe on the 18th, at Kenilworth on the 24th, and at Lichfield on the 29th. In September he moved about between Lichfield, Coventry, and Leicester; but by the beginning of October the Court seems to have settled itself at Coventry, where a council was assembled on the 7th.<sup>3</sup> To this council the Duke of York and his friends were regularly summoned, as well as the lords whom the queen intended to honor; but even before it met, changes had begun to be made in the principal officers of state.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>"Introduction", p. liv, Vol. IV.

<sup>3</sup>John Bocking to John Paston, 295, p. 401, Vol. I.

<sup>4</sup>"Introduction", p. cxvii, Vol. IV.



Not only did she strive to influence her husband, Henry VI, in political matters, but she also had definite ideas about the private lives of her subjects:

As for tydyngs, the Quene come in to this town (The little town of Paston) on Tewysday last past after none, and abode here tyll itt was Thursday, iij. after none; and she sent after my cos. Elysabeth Clere by Sharynborn, to come to her; and she durst not dysabey her commandment, and come to her. And when she come in the Quenys presens, the Quene made ryght meche of her, and desyryd here to have an hosbond, the which ye shall know of here after. But as for that, he is never nerrer than he was befor.

The Quene was right well pleasid with her answer, and reportyht of her in the best wyse, and seyth, be her throwth, she sey no jantylwoman syn she come into Norfolk that she lykit better than she doth her.<sup>5</sup>

In spite of the niceties of outward behavior it should not be forgotten that Queen Margaret could be cold-blooded in dealing with her enemies, as exemplified here:

And in Kent there as my wyfe dwellyd, they toke away all oure godes mevabyll that we had, and there wolde have hongyd my wyfe and v. of my children, and lefte her no more gode but her kyrtyll, the Bysshop Roffe spechyd me to the Quene, and so I was arestyed by the Quenes commaundment in to the Marchalsey, and there was in rygt grete durasse, and fere of my lyf, and was thretenyd to have ben hongyd, drawen, and quarteryd; and so wold have made me to have pechyd my Maister Fastolf of treson.<sup>6</sup>

Intrigue, bribes, threats, and any manner of achieving one's ends were allowed in the government, and they were used by the Queen. "The Quene is a grete and stronge labourid woman, for she spareth noo payne to sue hire thinges to an intent and conclusioun to hir power."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Margaret Paston to John, 187, p. 253, Vol. I, April 20, 1453.

<sup>6</sup>J. Payn to John Paston, 99, p. 134, Vol. I, 1450.

<sup>7</sup>John Bocking to Fastolf, 275, pp. 377-8, Vol. I, February 9, 1456.

Just about two weeks (February 25) after the above letter was written in 1456, the Lords relieved the Duke of York of his duties as Protector. King Henry VI was once again ruler in his own right. It must be noted, however, that the Queen had opposed the Duke of York being appointed Protector at all. In 1454 to gain control of the government during the King's illness she had presented a bill of articles in which she desired: (1) the whole rule of the land, (2) that she may make Chancellor and all other offices of the land, (3) that she might have bishoperies of the land, and (4) sufficient livelihood for the King, Prince, and herself.<sup>8</sup>

During the temporary reconciliation of opposite parties in 1458, a great council was held in London, and principal rivals walked hand in hand. The people rejoiced, for they believed, "All thing shall come to a good conclusion with God is grace, for the Kyng shall come hidre this weke, and the Quene also, some men sayn, and my Lord Buk, and Stafford with hire, and moche puple".<sup>9</sup>

Hopes for peace were short-lived, however, and a letter of 1461 tells of the royal flight to Scotland:

Item, Kyng Harry, the Qwen, the Prince, Duke of Somerest, Duke of Exeter, Lord Rees, be fledde in to Scotteland, and they be chased and felwed, etc.<sup>10</sup>

And again in 1462:

Item, the Qwen and Prince ben in Fraunce and ha mad moche weysse and grst peple to com to Scotland and ther trust to have secour, and thens to com in to Inglond...<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Newsletter of John Stodeley, 195, p. 265, Vol. I, 1454.

<sup>9</sup> John Boocking to Sir John Fastolf, 315, p. 426, Vol. I, March 15, 1458.

<sup>10</sup> W. Paston and Th. Playters to John Paston, 385, p. 5, Vol. II, April, 1461.

<sup>11</sup> Playter to John Paston, 459, p. 111, Vol. II, July, 1462.

Margaret's cause was far from popular, and the Earl of Oxford was executed for treason, because he corresponded with her concerning the restoration of Henry VI.<sup>12</sup> However, that she was not entirely without friends is shown in the loyalty of Lord Hungerford in 1461:

Ma dam, ferth (fear) you not, but be of gode comfort, and beware that ye aventure not your person, ne my Lord the Prynce (Edward, son of Henry VI), by the See, till ye have oder word from us, in less than your person cannot be sure there as ye are, (And) that extreme necessite dryfe you thens; and for God sake the Kyngs Highnes be advysed the same. For as we be enformed, Th'erll of March (Edward IV whom Lancastrians did not yet recognize as King) is into Wales by land, and hath sent his navy thider by see; and, Ma dame, thynketh verily, we shall not soner be delyvered, but that we well come strenght to you, without deth take us by the way, the which we trust we woll not, till we see the Kyng and you peissable ayens in your Reame; the which we besech God soon to see, and to send you that your Highnes desirith.<sup>13</sup>

Other accounts and movements of the Queen throughout the war are recorded in the correspondence, letters 386 and 668.<sup>14,15</sup>

History records this brutal civil war and its cruelties. Lord Clifford was particularly vicious and murdered the Duke of York's son, the Earl of Rutland. Then he slew the Duke of York in battle with these words from the Paston volumes: "Madam, your war is done; here is your king's ransom".<sup>16</sup>

The boast of Lord Clifford to Queen Margaret never proved true, for Edward IV was proclaimed king two months later. Henry VI never ruled again except for a few months in name only. And the son whom Margaret

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<sup>12</sup>Notes, Earl of Oxford, 390, p. 12, Vol. II, May 31, 1461.

<sup>13</sup>Lord Hungerford and Robert Whitynham to Margaret of Anjou, 413, p. 45, Vol. II, August 30, 1461.

<sup>14</sup>Thomas Playters to Master John Paston, 386, p. 7, Vol. II, April 18, 1461.

<sup>15</sup>Sir John Paston to Margaret Paston, 668, p. 4, Vol. III, April 18, 1471.

<sup>16</sup>"Introduction", pp. ccxx-1, Vol. IV.

had so perniciously fought for died before her, and the throne was lost to her forever.

The contrast of Margaret of Anjou and her enemies is given in the last reference to her in The Paston Letters:

As for any tydynges ther be noon heer, saffe that the Kyng hath kept a ryall Crystmesse; and now they seye that hastelye he woll northe, and some seye that he woll into Walye, and some seye that he woll into the West Centre. As ffor Queen Margrett, I understand that sche is remeyvd from Eyndesor to Walyngfforthe, nyghe to Ewheleme, my Lady of Suffolk Place in Oxenforthe schyre.<sup>17</sup>

Queen Margaret was much the same personality in King Henry VI, Part II, as she was in The Paston Letters. She was energetic, violent, passionate, and unfeminine in manners. One fact omitted by Shakespeare, and probably unknown to him, is that she committed treason in inviting the French to attack the English shore to divert the attention of the Duke of York. The possibility is very strong that Margaret of Anjou could be a first draft of Lady Macbeth without the latter's majesty, and both lived to see their ambitious plans crumble and their enemies succeed.

#### Duke of Suffolk

Shakespeare's William de la Pole, the Duke of Suffolk, seems to bear out history as to his character and death. He was ambitious, for he sought to discredit the Duke of York by withholding troops and supplies

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<sup>17</sup> Sir John Paston to Margaret Paston, 687, p. 33, Vol. I, January 8, 1472.

in France, an action which really amounted to treason. When he negotiated the marriage of Henry VI, he sought Margaret of Anjou for himself, and in the play he wins her love. His policy of state was consistently unpopular with the lords, but he had the King's support. However, with the charge of treason for delivering Maine and Anjou to the French, the King retreated from the issue by banishing William de la Pole.

Much attention is given to the Duke of Suffolk in The Paston Letters for a reason to be seen later. Also shown is another facet of Suffolk not utilized by Shakespeare--that of a gentle, God-fearing man advising his son. As mentioned above, Suffolk was referred to frequently in the Paston correspondence, because he was known personally by the Paston family.

Popular as he may have seemed, the Duke of Suffolk was not mourned by the people when he was killed. Even his friends did not write mournfully of his death. The impeachment of Suffolk as presented to King Henry VI contained the following accusations: First: the Duke in London in the Ward of Faringdon purposed to destroy your most royal person and provoked the Earl of Dunois and other enemies of your lord, calling himself king of France. Being most trusted, the Duke of Suffolk purposed Charles should conquer and get power and sought to deliver Charles of Orleans from prison. Item: With the comfort and council of Suffolk, Charles has made open war against you. When the Duke of Suffolk was on an ambassadorship he undertook to deliver Maunce and Maine to your enemies. Knowing the privacy of your council in France, he gave the purveyances of



arms, fortresses, seiges, etc. to the enemy. Ambassadors to Charles for peace have been ineffectual because he has been provoked by Suffolk. Item: Provision has been made for passage of arms, and he has passed them in favor and support of the enemy. Item: These actions have made the King of Arragon and Duke of Brittany enemies who once were friends. Of all these treasons and offences we Commons accuse and impeach William de la Pole.<sup>18</sup>

Margaret Paston wrote of Suffolk's pardon by the King:

Wylliam Rutt, the whiche is with Sir Jon Hevenyngham, kom hom from London sesterday, and he seyde playnly to his master, and to many other folkse, that the Duke of Suffolk is pardonyd, and hath his men aren waytyng up on hym, and is rytz wel at ese and mery, and is in the Kyngs gode grace, and in the gode conseyt of all the Lords, as well as ever he was.<sup>19</sup>

Shakespeare witholds the one redeeming trait of the Duke of Suffolk in the play, but he may not have known of the letter to Suffolk's son, which follows:

My dere and only welbeloved sone, I beseeche our Lord in Heven, the Maker of alle the world, to blesse you, and to sende you ever grace to love hym, and to drede hym; to the which, as ferre as a fader may charge his child, I both charge you, and prei you to sette alle spirites and wittes to do, and to knowe his holy lawes and comaundments, by the which ye shall with his grete mercy passe alle the grete tempestes and troubles of this wretched world. And that also wetyngly, ye do no thyng for love nor drede of any erthely creature that shuld desplease hym. And there as any freelte maketh you to falle, be secheth hys mercy soone to calle you to hym agen with repentaunce, satisfaccion, and contricion of youre herte never more in will to offend hym.

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<sup>18</sup> Impeachment of Duke of Suffolk, 76, p. 99, Vol. I, February 7, 1450.

<sup>19</sup> Margaret Paston to John, 81, p. 115, Vol. I, March 12, 1450.

Secondly, next hym, above alle erthely thyng, to be trewe liege man in hert, in wille, in thought, in dede, unto the Kyng our alder most high and drede sovereygne Lord, to whom bothe ye and I have been so moche bound to; charging you, as fader can and may, rather to die than to be the contrarye, or to knowe any thyng that were ayenste the welfare or prosperite of his most riall person, but that as ferre as your body and lyf may stretche, ye lyve and die to defende it, and to lete his highnesse have knowlache thereof in alle the haste ye can.

Thirdly, in the same eyse, I charge you, my dere sone, alway, as ye be bounden by the commaundement of God to do, to love, to worshepe youre lady and moder, and also that ye obey alway hyr commaundements, and to beleve hyr counselles and advises in alle youre werkes, the which dredeth not, but shall be best and trewest to you. And yef any other body wold stere you to the contrarie, to flee the counsell in any wyse, for ye shall fynde it nought and evyll.

Forth(more), as ferre as fader may and can, I charge you in any wyse to flee the company and counsel of proude men, of covetowse men, and of flatering men, the more especially and myghtily to withstonde hem, and not to drawe, ne to medle with hem, with all youre power and myght. And to drawe to you and to your comp (any good) and vertuowse men, and such as ben of good conversacion, and of treuthe, and be them shal ye never be deseyved, nor repente you off. (Moreover never follow) youre owne witte in no wyse, but in alle youre werkes, of suche folke as I write of above, axeth youre advise (and counsel); and doyng thus, with the mercy of God, ye shall do right well, and lyve in right moche worship, and grete herts rest and ease. And I wyll be to you as good lord and fader as my hert can thynke.<sup>20</sup>

William Lomner, who may have known the Duke of Suffolk personally, showed him to be a brave man, insisting that Suffolk voluntarily went to the King on April 30, 1450, for arrest.<sup>21</sup> Knowing the Duke wrote to his son on that day, the reader assumes that letter to be his parting advice to his heir. Lomner also told of forboding doom when he pointed out the Duke of Suffolk had his confessor with him.

After being exiled, Suffolk was murdered on the sea. His death is told of in the following letter:

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<sup>20</sup> Suffolk to his son, 91, p. 121, Vol. I, April 30, 1450.

<sup>21</sup> William Lomner to John Paston, 93, pp. 124-5, Vol. I, May 4, 1450.



First moost and especiall, that for verray trowthe upon Saturday that last was, the Duke of Suffolk was taken in the see, and there he was byheded, and his body with the appurtenaunce sette at lande at Dover, and all the folks that he haad with hym were sette to lande, and haad noon harme.<sup>22</sup>

The Pastons' interest in William de la Pole is not a coincidence.

This letter explains the reason:<sup>23</sup>

Item, where at Mighelmesse the yere passed the seid Paston sent his sone, a servaunt of my Lordis, and also Richard Calle, servaunt to the seid Paston put to hym by my Lordis fader (William de la Pole. It is a piece of information which we do not meet with elsewhere, that Richard Calle entered the service of the Pastons by this Duke's recommendation.), to resseyve the profitez of the seid maner as thei had do many yeres before...

The servant, Richard Calle, was important in the Paston history, for it was he who caused a scandal by marrying Margery Paston, daughter of Margaret and John Paston. The couple was never completely forgiven by the Pastons.

Although the policy of the Duke of Suffolk was unpopular, he had great influence to which lesser lords and commoners appealed for the return of stolen goods or imprisoned men.<sup>24,25,26</sup> Even popular at first was his arranging of Margaret's marriage to Henry VI. The Duke of Gloucester, his chief rival and opponent in Parliament, was the first to rise and recommend Suffolk for his services to the crown. Even the cession of Maine and Anjou at this time does not seem to be opposed.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>22</sup> John Crane to John Paston, 94, p. 126, Vol. I, May 6, 1450.

<sup>23</sup> (John) Paston to (The Duke of Suffolk), LI, p. 76, Vol. IV, 1462-3.

<sup>24</sup> Edmund Paston to John Paston, 53, p. 65, Vol. I, 1447 (?).

<sup>25</sup> Margaret Paston to John, 66, p. 81, Vol. I, April 2, 1449.

<sup>26</sup> William Tailboys to Viscount Beaumont, 75, p. 96, Vol. I, before 1450.

<sup>27</sup> "Introduction", liv, Vol. IV.

Duke Humphrey, despite many defects of character, had always been a popular favorite. With his mysterious death, suspicion fell upon Suffolk. There is no reason to suppose that Suffolk was guilty of intrigue or conspiracy, but he was suspected of procuring the good Duke's death. Therein started his downfall.

One item of interest in the life of Suffolk is that his lady was the granddaughter of Geoffrey Chaucer.<sup>28</sup> After the assassination of her husband, the Duchess of Suffolk and Sir John Paston had some legal difficulty involving the manor of Coton.<sup>29,30</sup>

According to The Paston Letters, Suffolk was ambitious, for he was tried for treason; brave, for he came voluntarily to the King in great danger; genuine and sincere in his advice to the son; and not necessarily guilty of intrigue in the death of Gloucester. Along with these conclusions must be the realization that he was personally known by the Pastons or at least had done favors to some members of the family. However, not even this friendship caused them to write mournfully of his death.

The Duke of Suffolk appears much the same in King Henry VI, Part II, as in The Paston Letters with the exception of Suffolk's letter to his son. Shakespeare probably did not know of this correspondence, and he probably would not have used it had he known, for the message is not in keeping with William de la Pole's previous actions or attitudes.

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<sup>28</sup>Note to Abstracts, p. 27, Vol. I, 1426.

<sup>29</sup>Earl of Oxford to Sir John Paston, 597, p. 336, Vol. II, January 7, 1469 (?).

<sup>30</sup>Anonymous to Sir John, 591, p. 324, Vol. II.

### Duke of Somerset

Shakespeare makes the Duke of Somerset an ambitious Lancastrian who conspired with the Queen against the Duke of York. In the play the Duke of Salisbury epitomizes Somerset as ambition itself.

Little was said of his personality in The Paston Letters, but it does seem obvious that Somerset's ambition was not just Shakespeare's doing. Finally to curb the Duke of Somerset's ambition the Duke of Norfolk presented a petition in the House of Lords, suggesting his conflict in France and England be made the subject of investigation by separate tribunals under each country's laws.<sup>31</sup>

Somerset's administration of the Duchy of Normandy was a mixture of dishonesty and indiscretion to the point of treason. He arranged a breach of truce in the capture of Fougères and pocketed compensations which belonged to the people.<sup>32</sup> His avarice and lack of honor nearly drove the English completely out of France.

Because of his surrender of Caen and the total loss of Normandy, Somerset was one of the most unpopular men in England. Representative letters of the Pastons refer indifferently to his whereabouts.<sup>33,34,35</sup> This almost total lack of interest is significant when one realizes that Anne, the daughter of Edmund Beaufort, Duke of Somerset, married William

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<sup>31</sup> Duke of Norfolk's Petition, 191, p. 259, Vol. I, 1453.

<sup>32</sup> "Introduction", pp. cxvii-viii, Vol. IV.

<sup>33</sup> Henry Wyndesore to John Paston, 416, p. 52, Vol. II, October 4, 1461.

<sup>34</sup> John Paston, the younger, to Margaret Paston, 585, p. 319, Vol. II, July 8, 1468.

<sup>35</sup> Report of French Prisoners, 443, p. 93, Vol. II, 1462.

Paston, uncle of Sir John Paston.<sup>36</sup> This relationship would make the Duke of Somerset the father of Sir John Paston's aunt.

In spite of the indifference toward the Duke of Somerset by the Pastons and other high standing families and the suspicion of the House of Lords, Somerset stood high in the King's favor through the intercession of the Queen. In 1451 while York was living in seclusion at his castle of Ludlow, Somerset used his influence with the King to instill distrust of York's fidelity toward King Henry VI. Jealousy of the Duke of York's success in France still rankled the pride of the Duke of Somerset.

At Blackheath in March, 1452, when the Duke of York demanded that the Duke of Somerset be placed in confinement, he was given a simple pledge by the King. It is said that many of the Lancastrians themselves were in favor of this move, for Somerset was unpopular even with the King's party.<sup>37</sup> As history records, the King's promise was not kept, and it was York who was placed in custody, but he was too popular for the Queen's party to keep him in confinement.

The Duke of Norfolk's petition with charges of treason against Somerset had been presented in 1453 during Henry VI's illness. Upon the King's recovery the Duke of Somerset was released from prison and promoted to even greater honor.

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<sup>36</sup> Note to 642, p. 400, Vol. II.

<sup>37</sup> "Introduction", p. cxv, Vol. IV.

Although Somerset labored for royal honor, he was not a popular favorite. He was ambitious and avaricious without the wise leadership needed during those troubled times. Not even the Pastons who were related by marriage mentioned him favorably, or in fact, mentioned him very much at all. The Duke of Somerset appears in The Paston Letters, as he appears in the Earl of Salisbury's speech in King Henry VI, Part II, Act I, scene i:

Pride went before, (Buckingham) ambition follows him (Somerset),  
While these do labour for their own preferment,  
Behoves it us to labour for the realm.

Cardinal Henry Beaufort

To continue the Earl of Salisbury's speech begun above:

Oft have I seen the haughty cardinal  
More like a soldier than a man o' the church,  
As stout and proud as he were lord of all,  
Swear like a ruffian and demean himself  
Unlike the ruler of a commonweal.

In the play Cardinal Beaufort rejoiced in the downfall of the popular Duke of Gloucester, in fact, aided in his murder. He encouraged the breach that led to war and acted the part of a political conspirator.

According to evidence in the Letters, the Cardinal seemed to enter into the matters of worldly goods more often than was customary for churchmen, but there was no substantiating proof for the charges presented in King Henry VI, Part II, but that would not positively

indicate the Cardinal's contemporaries thought him any more a religious churchman.

Cardinal Beaufort participated in an exchange of land between the King and William Paston in 1443.<sup>38</sup> He also had a hand in the will of Sir John Pastolf.<sup>39,40</sup>

No reference whatever was found in The Paston Letters to the boast of the Cardinal in the play that he should not die because he had so many riches. (King Henry VI, Part II, Act III, Scene iii.) Of special interest is the fact that Cardinal Beaufort is mentioned only four times in the entire collection of Paston correspondence, and that mention refers to money matters--a peculiar position for a churchman.

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<sup>38</sup> Abstract, 96, p. 418, Vol. III, October 17, 1443.

<sup>39</sup> Abstract, 974, p. 430, Vol. III.

<sup>40</sup> Sir John Pastolf was not the beggarly man of the dramatist, and had a hand in many money matters. His correspondence in The Paston Letters consists of legal correspondence, abstracts, bills of sale, etc. He also had a wide knowledge of law.



## OPPORTUNIST FACTION

In the play of King Henry VI, Part II, Shakespeare portrayed York as a covetous, ambitious man who laid plans and let the characters work their own doom. Then he opportunely stepped in with armed force and took the throne. He did not actively work for the death of the Duke of Gloucester, yet he did nothing to protect him. The Duke of York was the most capable ruler the period produced, uniting factions or leading opposing groups for the "House" of York.

From the evidence in The Paston Letters the reader will agree with Shakespeare that York did take advantage of his opportunities. However, there is no information proving that he made those opportunities with such men as Jack Cade, who posed as John Mortimer, cousin of York. In addition, Gairdner gave information showing that the Duke of York was forced to arm himself with followers to escape the plots of Somerset. Furthermore, it was evident that in acting in his own defense, he also acted in the defense of the common people. Here was a man who had rank, wealth, lineage, popularity, and well-proved ability as a general, administrator, and diplomat, but who could also be surprisingly gullible on occasion.

The Duke of York was interested in all matters concerning government, and The Paston Letters show his interest in the elections of the sheriffs. The year is uncertain, but it is believed to be October 16,

1450, when York wrote to John Paston:

Right trusti and welbelovid, we grete you well. And forasmeche as oure unkill of York and we have fully appoynted and agreed of such ij. persones for to be knightes of shire of Norfolk as oure said unkill and we thinke convenient and necessarie for the welfare of the said shire, we therfor pray you, in oure said unkill name and cures bothe, as ye list to stonde in the favour of oure good Lordshipp that ye make no labour contrarie to oure desire.<sup>1</sup>

In 1450 another letter concerning politics from John Damme and James Gresham to John Paston said:

...It is seid here that the Duke of York and the Duke of Norfolk shulln not come here this vii nyght.

As touchyng shirefs, ther arn none chosyn ne named, and as men suppose, non shall be chosyn til my Lord of Yorke comyng, etc.<sup>2</sup>

In spite of York's active part in all government matters, a faction about the King had taken care to keep him at a distance from the Court. During York's absence in Ireland his enemies were becoming increasingly unpopular with the people but increasingly influential with Henry VI until they threatened York's very safety and "it was no longer his duty to obey the orders of others".<sup>3</sup>

He came over from Ireland, collected 4000 of his retainers upon the Welsh Marches and proceeded to London. Gairdner records there were bodies of Lord Grey of Ruthin's men lying in wait to interrupt his progress.<sup>4</sup> Holinshed maintained that the Duke of York waited

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<sup>1</sup>119, p. 160, Vol. I.

<sup>2</sup>122, pp. 162-3, Vol. I.

<sup>3</sup>"Introduction", p. xcii, Vol. IV.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. xcii.

for a year after returning from Ireland before he proceeded to London and the King. Whether for unity of time or for other reasons, Shakespeare revamped the time to an immediate meeting of York and the King. Gairdner observes that the latter theory is probably correct.<sup>5</sup>

If he came to the King's chamber in warlike array, his access must have been opposed to the last. In his first interview with Henry his petition was diplomatically presented and a reply given. Here is, in part, the petition, as recorded in Holinshed:<sup>6</sup>

Item, at such time as I was purposed for to have arrived at your haven of Beaumaris, for to have come to your noble presence to declare me your true man and subject, as my duty is, my landing was stopped and forebarred by Henry Norris, Thomas Norris, William Buckley, William Crust, and Bartholomew Bould, your officers in North Wales, that I should not land there, nor have victuals nor refreshing for me and my fellowship, as I have written to your Excellency here before; so far forth, that Henry Norris, deputy to the chamberlain of North Wales, said unto me that he had in commandment that I should in no wise have landing, refreshing, nor lodging, for men nor horse, nor other thing that might turn to my worship or ease; putting the blame upon Sir William Say, usher of your chamber, saying and affirming that I am against your intent and (held) as a traitor, as I am informed. And, moreover, certain letters were made and delivered unto Chester, Shrewsbury, and to other places, for to let mine entry into the same.

Item, above all wrongs and injuries above said, done unto me of malice without any cause, I being in your land of Ireland in your honourable service, certain commissions were made and directed unto divers persons, which for the execution of the same sat in certain places, and the juries impanelled and charged. Unto

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. xciii.

<sup>6</sup>"Introduction", p. xciii, Vol. IV.

the which juries certain persons laboured instantly to have me indicted of treason, to the intent for to have undone me and mine issue, corrupted my blood, as it is openly published. Beseeching your Majesty royal of your righteousness to de examine these matters, and thereupon to de such justice in this behalf as the cause requirerth; for mine intent is fully to pursue to your Highness for the conclusion of these matters.

In addition to using his diplomacy to defend his own rights before the King, York also defended the people's rights, as indicated in a letter of October 6, 1450:

Syr, and it plesse, I was in my Lord of Yorks howse, and I herde meche thyng more thanne my mayster wrytyth un to yow of. I herde meche thyng in Fletestrede. But, Sir, my Lord was with the Kynge and he vesaged so the mater that alle the Kynge's howshold was and is aferd rhyght sore; and my seyde Lord hayth putte a bille to the Kynge (that justice should be fairly administered against persons accused), and desyryd meche thyng, quych is meche after the Comouns desyre, and all is up on justice, and to putte all thos that ben indyted under arest with owte suerte or maynpryce, and to be tryed be lawe as lawe wyll; in so meche that on Monday Sir William Oldhall was with the Kynge at Westmynster more thanne to houres, and hadde of the Kynge good cher.<sup>7</sup>

Was York a friend of the commons in presenting a bill that justice should be fairly administered against persons accused? The following quotation is what he wrote to King Henry VI in presenting this bill:

Please it your Hyghnes tendirly to consider the grett grutchyng and romer that is universal in this your reame of that justice is nouth dewly ministred to such as trespas and offende a yens your lawes, and in special of them that ben endited of treson, and other beyng openly noysed of the same; wherfore for gret inconveniencs that have fallen, and grett is lyke to fallen her after in your

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<sup>7</sup> William Wayte to John Paston, 113, p. 150, Vol. I.

seid reame, which God defende, but if (unless) be your Hyghness provysion convenable be mad for dew reformation and punyshment in this behalff; Wherefore I, your humble suget and lyge man, Richard, Duke of York, willyng as effectually as I kan, and desiryng suerte and prosperite of your most roiall person, and welfare of this your noble reame, councel and advertyse your excellent, for the conversacion (conservation) of good tranquillite and pesable rewle among all trew sogetts, for to ordeyn and provyde that dewe justice be had a yenset all such that ben so endited or openly so noysed: wher inne I offre, and wol put me in devour for to execute your comaundments in thes premises of such offenders, and redresse of the seid mysrewlers to my myth and power. And for the hasty execucion herof, lyke it your Hyghnes to dresse your letteres of prevy seale and writts to your officers and ministres to do take, and araste all such persons so noysed or endited, of what astate, degre, or condicion so ever thei be, and them to comytte to your Tour of London, or to other your prisons, there to abyde with onten bayle or maynprice on to the tyme that they be utterly tryed and declared, after the cours of your lawe.<sup>8</sup>

Although York was cognizant of the people's grievances, he was conscious that the laws of the land were then being administered by his rival, the Duke of Somerset, "such as trespass and offende a yens your lawes, and in special of them that ben endited of treson".

The course of justice was not an easy one, and Richard Plantagenet had not succeeded in establishing the government upon a satisfactory basis. In those days of the judgment of the "Commons" an error in policy was nothing short of treason. Whoever took upon him to guide the king's counsels knew very well the danger of his task; and York (if his character is understood) was anxious, until he was driven desperate, never to assume more authority than he was distinctly warranted in doing. He could not but remember that his father had

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<sup>8</sup> 114, p. 153, Vol. I, 1450.



suffered death for conspiring to depose Henry V, and that his own high birth and descent from Edward III caused his acts to be all the more jealously watched by those who sought to estrange him from his sovereign. He therefore made it by no means his aim to establish for himself a marked ascendancy. He rather sought to show his moderation.<sup>9</sup>

For his own protection in 1452 he issued a manifesto of loyalty to dispel the suspicions instilled in the royal ear by the Duke of Somerset.<sup>10</sup> At length York could no longer abide the advisers of the King who set out to undo him, and in March, 1452, Richard Plantagenet collected a host and took the field. On a pledge that Somerset would be placed in confinement, York gullibly dismissed his force. However, he had been deceived, and it was the Duke of York who became virtually a prisoner. Because of his popularity, no charges were brought against him. In 1453 York brought formal charges against Somerset, seeking to do what he had attempted by force. The accused was arrested and sent to the tower.<sup>11</sup>

Tension continued, as indicated by a newsletter of John Stodeley:

Item, the Duke of York wole be a Londone justly on Fryday next comyng at night, as his owne men tellen for certain, and he wole come with his household meynne, clenly beseen and likly men. And Th'erle of Marche (afterwards Edward IV, his eldest son) cometh with hym, but he will have a nother feliship of gode men that shall be at Londone before hym...<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> "Introduction", p. xcii, Vol. IV.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. cxi.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. cxix-cxxiii.

<sup>12</sup> 195, p. 265, Vol. I, January 19, 1454.



The tensions were further illustrated in a letter of another subject:

Also my Lord of Caunterbury Master Waltier Bl(a)kette will help forthe, if nede be; and as to the remenant of the Lordes, if the case requir that ye may understand by your sysdem thei be displeased with me--as I trust to God thei be not,--I beseeche you to remembr that I have aforetyme b(en) accused unto the Kings Highnesse and the Quenes for owyng my pore gode will and service unto my Lord of York and other, etc...And within this ij yer we were in like wise laboured ageyns to the Quene, so that she wrote to my Lord to avoide us, sayyng that the King and she coude nor myght in no wyse be assured of hym and my Lady as long as we wer aboute hym...<sup>13</sup>

Political loyalties were, indeed, a matter of life and death, but as early as 1450 financial prosperity seemed uncertain, too. In the early 1450's many noblemen borrowed money to finance themselves. On December 18, 1452, the Duke of York committed himself to Sir John Fastolf for a loan of money with jewels being the security.<sup>14</sup> This transaction was characteristic of Sir John Fastolf, who, unlike the dramatist's needy Falstaff, was always seeking to increase his wealth.<sup>15</sup>

In May 21, 1455, the Duke of York and the Earls of Warwick and Salisbury drew up a memorial to Henry VI, which the Duke of Somerset and friends would not allow to be presented to the King:

Moste Cristen Kyng, ryght hygh and myghty Prince, and our mooste redbouted souverayn Lorde, we recomaunde ws as humblye as we suffice unto your hygh excellence, where unto please it to

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<sup>13</sup> Richard Southwell to John Paston, 218, pp. 304-5, Vol. I, October 6, 1454.

<sup>14</sup> The Duke of York and Sir John Fastolf, 184, p. 249, Vol. I.

<sup>15</sup> "Introduction", p. cxxxiii, Vol. IV.

Another instance of dramatic expediency with the character Falstaff was in making him a dramatic coward, a charge made during an engagement with the French against Fastolf, which was later disproved. However, Fastolf did not stand well with his fellow men.

wete that for so moche as we hyre and understand to our grettyst sorowe erthlye that our ennynes of approved experience, such as abyde and kepe theym sylf under the whyng of your Magestee Royall, have throwen unto the same ryght stedyously and ryght fraudulentlye manye ambyguytees and doubtis of the fayth, lygeaunce, and dewtee that, God knowyth, we beere unto your Hyghnesse, and have put theym yn as grete devoyr as they coude to enstraunge us from your mooste noble presence and from the favour of your goode grace; whych goode grace to us ys and owe to be our singuler and mooste desyred yoie and consolacion; We at thys tyme be comyng wyth grace as your true and humble liege men, toward your seyd Hygh Excellence to declare and shew tharto at large our sayd fayth and ligeaunce, entending wyth the mercey of Jesu yn the seyd comyng, to put us yn as diligent and hertye devoyr and dewtee as onye your lyge men on lyve to that at may avaunce or preferre the honnour and wellfare off the sayd Mageste Royalle and the seurte of the sayd most notable person; the whych (we) besече our blessed creature to prosper (in) as grete honnor, yoie, and felicitie as ever had onye prince erthlye, and to your said Hyghnesse so to take, accept, and repute us, and not to plesse to geve trust or confidence unto the sinistrey, maliciouse, and fradulent labourer and rapportes of our sayd ennemyes unto our comyng to your sayd mooste noble presence; where unto we besече humblye that we may be admittid as your liege men, to th' entent to shew us the same...<sup>16</sup>

Upon receipt of the King's refusal, the above quotation continues with the advice of York to his lords:

The Kyng our sovereyne Lord will not be reformed at our besechyng ne prayer, ne wylle not understonde the entent that we be comen hedes and assembled fore and gadered at this tyme; but only ys full purpose, and there noon other way but that he wole with all his power pursue us, and yf ben taken, to geve us a shameful deth, losyng our lyvelode and goodes, and our heyres shamed for evere. (These threats were made by the King.) And ther fore, sythe yt wole be noon othere wyse but that we shall etterly dye, better yt ys for us to dye in the feld than

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<sup>16</sup> Memorial to Henry VI, p. 236, pp. 325-6, Vol. I, May 21, 1455.

cowardly to be put to a grete rebuke and assamefful deth; more over, consederyng yn what peryle Inglonde stondes inne at thys cure, therefore every man help to help power for the ryght thers offe, to redresse the myscheff that now regneth, and to quyte us lyke men in this querell; preyng to that Lord that ys Kyng of Glorye, that regneth in the Kyngdom celestyall, to kepe us and save us this day in our right, and thorough the helpe of His holy grace we may be made strong to with stonde the grete abomynable and cruell malyse of them that purpose fully to destroye us with shameful deth. We ther fore, Lord, pray to The to be our comfort and Defender, sayng the word afore seyde, Domine sis clipeus defensiois nostras.

After appealing for an audience and the arrest of men they classed as traitors, the Yorkists took the field at St. Alban's. From the above evidence the Duke of York appeared a wronged leader who was forced to resort to arms, but who assumed them reluctantly. With his success at St. Alban's, however, he did not presume to the throne but pledged his loyalty to the King. He was forgiven by King Henry VI and became once again influential in the royal counsels.<sup>17</sup> Evidence points to the existence of a strong enemy faction:

Hit was sayd, for sothe, that Harpers and ij. other of the Kynges chamber were confedered to have steked the Deuk York in the Kynges chamber; but hit was not so, for they have clered theym therof.<sup>18</sup>

Although assassination was a very real danger for York, to many of the people the coming of York was like a shining star, for it meant leadership in government, as written in a letter by John Bocking:

And now suche tidinges as ar here, but fewe that ar straunge, excepte that this day my Lordes York and Warwik comen to the

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<sup>17</sup> John Crane to John Paston, 241, pp. 333-334, Vol. I.

<sup>18</sup> William Barker to William Worcester, 243, p. 336, Vol. I.

Parlement in a good array, to the noubre of iij<sup>e</sup> (300) men, all jakkid and in brigantiens, and noo lord elles, wherof many men mervailed. It was seid on Saterday my Lord shuld have ben discharged this same day. And this day was seide, but if he hadde come stronge, he shuld have bene distrussid; and no man knoweth or can sey that only prefe may be hadde by whom, for men thinken verily there is no man able to any suche enterprinsse.

The Kyng, as it was tolde me by a grete man, wolde have hym chief and princepall counceller, and soo to be called hise chef counceller and lieutenant as longe as hit shuld lyke the Kyng; and hise patent to be made in that forme, and not soo large as it is by Parlement. But soome men thinken it wil ner can otherwise bee; and men speke and devyne moche maters of the comyng this day in suche array to Westminster. And the Lordes spoken this day in the Parlement of a greet gleymyng sterre that but late hathe be seen diverse tymes mervelious in apperyng. The resumpsion, men truste, shall forthe, and my Lordes of Yorkes first power of protectorship stande, and elles not, etc. The Quene is a grete and stronge labourid woman, for she spareth no payne to sue hire thinges to an intent and conclusion to hir power.<sup>19</sup>

The powers of such strong willed individuals were sure to clash, and the dissension of the Queen and York is illustrated by the following letter:

And it is seid that my Lord of York hath be with the Kyng, and is departed ageyn in right good conceyt with the Kyng, but not in gret conceyt with the Whene (Queen); and sum men sey, he hadde my Lord of Buks (Buckingham) not have letted it, my Lord of York had be distressed in his departyng.<sup>20</sup>

Suspensions of the times kept the lords separated from the King and Queen, although some time was spent in trying to make peace between York and the Queen, which is evidently the meaning of the last line of the following quotation:

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<sup>19</sup> John Bocking to Sir John Pastolf, 275, pp. 377-8, Vol. I.

<sup>20</sup> James Gresham to John Paston, 298, p. 408, Vol. I, October 16, 1456.

As for tidings, the Kyng is at Shene, the Quene at Chestre; the Duc of Buk was, as I come hiderward, at Writell, the Erle of Warrewyke at Werrewyke, and the Lorde Chaunceller, Tresorier, and th' Erle of Sar' (Salisbury) in London, and noo more Lords at the begynnyng this day of the grete Counsaill...My Lord York is at Sendall stille, and wayteth on the Quene and she up on hym.<sup>21</sup>

During the compromises and "era of good feeling" in 1458 tensions had not greatly lessened, for the nobles brought large followings with them to London:

The Kyng came the last weke to Westminster, and the Duk of Yorke came to London with hys cune houscle onlye to the nombre of cxi. hors, as it ys seyde; the Erle of Salysburye with iiii.j. (400) hors yn hys companye, fourscore knyghts and squyers.

The Duke of Somerset came to London last day of Janyver with 200 hors, and leggyth wythoute Temple Barre, and the Duc of Excestre shalle be here, thys weke with a grete felyschyp and strong, as it ys seyde.<sup>22</sup>

To show a leadership trait and the command that York showed as protector of England during Henry VI's illness, he responded to James II of Scotland when that king was haughty toward England. York threatened to march against that king if he did not treat England with more respect. No armies were involved, and it was only an exchange of correspondence, but York had made a popular move against the Scotchman. However, Henry later absolved all connection with this correspondence and policy when he recovered and made it clear York had acted on his own initiative in the name of the king.

In spite of the Duke of York's leadership and his general popularity, as has been pointed out, he had strong enemies. In all the Paston

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<sup>21</sup>John Bocking to John Paston, 285, p. 392, Vol. I, June 7, 1456.

<sup>22</sup>William Botoner to Sir John Fastolf, 313, p. 424, Vol. I, February 1, 1458.



correspondence there is only one glimmer of York's ambition for its own sake, and in a letter of 1460 Margaret Paston wrote:

Ther is gret talkyng in thys contre of the desyir of my Lorde of York. (The claim made by Richard, Duke of York, to the crown in Parliament on October 17, 1460.) The pepyll reporte full worschepfully of my Lord of Warwyk. They have no fer her but that he and othyr scholde schewe to gret favor to hem that have be rewylers of thys contre be for tyme.<sup>23</sup>

After the battle of Northampton the Yorkists issued a manifesto of policy, which again showed the firmness of Richard Plantagenet and his power of decision, whether used for the unity of England or his own ambitions. Although the death of the Duke of York came during the battle of Wakefield, and chaos came immediately after for the Yorkists,<sup>24</sup> Edward IV, his son, became the King of England two months later. Edward had at the age of twelve his own household and was well trained by his father as a leader. Thus the early training of a boy by his powerful father set a king upon the throne.

Edward and Edmund wrote at the ages of twelve and eleven an insight into the character of their father, the Duke of York:

And where ye comaunde us by your said lettres to attende specialy tooure lernyng in our yong age that schulde cause us to growe to honour and worship in our elde age...Ryght hiegh and myghty Prince, our most worschippfull and gretely redoubted lorde and Fader, We beseeche almyghty God yeve yowe as good lyfe and longe as youre owne Princely hert con best desire.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Margaret Paston to John Paston, 361, p. 532, Vol. I, October 21, 1460.

<sup>24</sup> Friar Brackley to (John Paston), 48, p. 71, January (?), 1461 (?), Vol. IV.

<sup>25</sup> "Introduction", p. clxx, Vol. IV.

Such was the picture of the Duke of York as seen in The Paston Letters by the contemporary lords, lesser lords, commoners, and finally his sons. The Duke of York from the pens of these writers emerges as diplomatic, popular, wealthy although he borrowed money on occasion, gullible, affectionate to his sons, and a wise leader as protector of England.

Shakespeare and The Paston Letters agree York was diplomatic, in fact, the playwright portrayed him to the point of being an opportunist, which, no doubt, he was. The other traits are in agreement for the man who would "raise aloft the milk-white rose". In King Henry VI, Part II, his gullibility in accepting the King's word for the arrest of Somerset and then being taken prisoner himself is given emphasis. As to the motives of the Duke of York, he probably was forced to take arms for his own protection, and his birth, popularity, and leadership surged him forward. History demanded such a man to restore the York lineage to the throne. His purpose was given in the play, Act I, scene 1:

Then will I raise aloft the milk-white rose,  
With whose sweet smell the air shall be perfum'd,  
And in my standard bear the arms of York,  
To grapple with the house of Lancaster;  
And, force perforce, I'll make him yield the crown,  
Whose bookish rule hath pull'd fair England down.

## AMBIGUOUS FACTION

Henry VI appeared in a separate section, not because of his strength as a ruler, but because his vacillating character makes it impossible to classify him as belonging to any faction or having any policy of his own. Shakespeare's Henry VI was a man who lived in constant terror lest his lords fly at each other's threats. His moralizing, however, did not stop their bandying of furious words. He would go to any length to avoid the use of force. He allowed the innocent Gloucester to be foully murdered and soothed his conscience with the knowledge that he was not responsible. It was the Earl of Warwick who sought revenge, but the King simply philosophized in the play, Act III, scene ii:

What stronger breastplate than a heart untainted!  
Thrice is he arm'd that hath his quarrel just,  
And he but naked, though lock'd up in steel,  
Whose conscience with injustice is corrupted.

At the demands of the people he reluctantly arrested Suffolk, but again refused to judge him for five years. Henry VI was a tool of ambitious advisers, but he would not defend them later. Each nobleman consequently looked to his own defense and safety. King Henry VI's want of every spark of kingly or even manly spirit was excused by his thinking that he was saintly when, as a matter of fact, he lacked the energy to control even his own wife.

In the play, Henry VI clings to his wife as to something stronger than himself. Yet in his very mildness he rises above her and even,

in part, above the conflict of the civil war. A strong ruler could have prevented the war, but he dismissed troubles by moralizing or leaving decisions to others.

According to The Paston Letters there were many decisions to be made even to conflicts concerning estates and goods of individual citizens, as in letters 29 and 87.<sup>1,2</sup> The people, too, had their own ideas of justice and how it should be meted out, but with the threat of treason charges, they seldom expressed themselves in writing unless they felt strongly about a decision, as in the following:

And he (Blake the baly of Swafham) yede streyt to my lord Chaunceler and told my seyde lord that yf the Kyng pardoned sir Thomas Tudenham and Heydon her issewes that the shire of Suffolk wold paye no taxe; for what nedyth the kyng for to have the taxe of hese pore puple whanne he wyll not take hese issues of thos rych extorssioners and oppressors of hese puple. And also he told my seyde lord Chaunceler and many more lordes that yf the kyng pardon hym or graunted any supersedeas, London shuld with inne short tyme have as moche for to do as they hadde for to kepe London Brygge whanne the Capteyn (Jack Cade) cam thedir...<sup>3</sup>

During this time of English history, however, the people as a whole did not sit in juries or determine policy. To follow the above letter is an observation about that incident:

It is seyde her that the kyng shuld com in to this contre, and sir Thomas Todenham and Heydon arn well cheryeshid with hym.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Osbert Maudford to John Paston, 29, pp. 43-44, Vol. IV, February 9, 1452.

<sup>2</sup> Margaret Paston to John, 87, p. 143, Vol. IV, October 23, 1472 (?).

<sup>3</sup> William Wayte to John Paston, 23, pp. 33-34, Vol. IV, January 3, 1451.

<sup>4</sup> Margaret Paston to John, 27, pp. 40-41, Vol. IV, March 14, 1451.

More serious trouble than opinions of the lesser nobles was threatening in the 1450's, and with the Memorial to Henry VI by the Duke of York and the Earl of Warwick<sup>5</sup> came the battle of St. Alban's. The battle possibly could have been avoided by discarding unpopular advisers, particularly Somerset, but the King refused in his answer to York:

I, Kyng Herry, charge and comaund that no maner persone, of what degre or state, or condicyon that evere he be, abyde not, but voyde the felde, and not be so hardy to make any reesyens agayne me in myn owne realme; for I shall knowe what traytor dar be so bolde to reyse aepull in myn owne lond, where though I am in grete desese and hevynesse. And by the feyth of Ingland, I shal destrye them every moder sone, and they be hanged, and drawen, and quartered, that may be taken afterward, of them to have ensample to alle such traytours to be war to make only such rysyng of peple withinne my lond, and so traytorly to abyde her Kyng and governour. And for a conclusyon, rather then they shall have ony Lorde with me at this tyme, I shall this day, for her sake, and in this quarrell my sylff lyve or dye.<sup>6</sup>

The Duke of York had not always been out of favor, for in 1454 when King Henry VI became ill, York was the Protector. The King did not recognize anyone during his illness, not even his baby son or realize that his heir had even been presented to him. Sharing the control of the government during this period were the Earls of Warwick and Salisbury.<sup>7</sup> During his first recovery about Christmas of 1454, he learned of the birth of his son, "And he seith he is

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<sup>5</sup> Memorial to Henry VI, 238, p. 325, Vol. I, May 21, 1455.

<sup>6</sup> The Battle of St. Alban's, 239, pp. 328-9, Vol. I, May 21-22, 1455.

<sup>7</sup> Newsletter of John Stodeley, 195, p. 263, Vol. I, 1454.

<sup>8</sup> James Gresham to John Paston, 257, p. 350, Vol. I, October 28, 1455.



in charites with all the world, and so he wold all the Lords were.  
And now he seith matyns of Our Lady and evesong, and herith his  
Masse devoutly..."<sup>9</sup>

As for the war, when the King was mentioned, he was more of a religious figurehead than a general. He was the weakest of the Queen's party, and the Queen was nearly always in his company.<sup>10,11,12</sup> Although it is almost impossible to determine which party was stronger with the people, the Queen's or the Duke of Gloucester's faction, the Queen's party did hold considerable sway, for the people believed because the Lancastrians had ruled since Henry IV, they should continue.

The Duke of York ys at Debylyn (Dublin), strengthed with hys Erles and homagers, as ye shall see by a bille. God send the Kyng vistorie of hys ennemyes, and rest and peace among hys Lordes.<sup>13</sup>

On the other hand, there seemed to be rejoicing at a stronger hand over the realm when the Duke of York and later Edward IV ruled.<sup>14</sup> Only a strong hand could keep the powerful noblemen of the age in check, and as shown in King Henry VI, Part II, and The Paston Letters the King could not offer that leadership. Throughout his rule were murmurings of discontent. In the play the first signs of discontent

<sup>9</sup> Edmund Clere to John Paston, 226, pp. 314-15, Vol. I, January 9, 1455.

<sup>10</sup> Playter to John Paston, 459, p. 111, Vol. II, July, 1462.

<sup>11</sup> Sir Thomas Howes to John Paston, 440, p. 91, Vol. III.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Playter to John Paston, 387, pp. 8-9, Vol. II, May, 1461.

<sup>13</sup> William Botoner to John Berney, 345, p. 505, Vol. I, January, 1460.

<sup>14</sup> William Paston and Th. Playter to John Paston, 385, p. 5, Vol. II, April 4, 1461.

were in the terms of Henry VI's marriage and the sacrifice of Maine and Anjou to the French as dowry. In the Paston correspondence there was a hint of such a possible discontent really existing:

...and I praye yow to send me tydynggs<sup>15</sup> from be yond see, for here thei arn a ferde to tell soche as be reported.<sup>16</sup>

Consequently, the King who relied heavily upon advisers for the choice of a wife, as well as all state policy brought civil war among those counsellors. Suffolk met death for his policy, York was constantly in danger of being tried for treason, Somerset lost his life defending his king. The first blow, however, was the murder of Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, and the man who sat on the throne had not the courage to punish his murderers. Yet King Henry showed himself yet more of a coward, for at the approach of Jack Cade and his rabble forces, he fled London even though loyal subjects swore to defend him.

Cowardly, powerless, indecisive, and dependent on his wife for government, Henry VI failed to keep the throne. To replace his weakness came the strength of the Yorkists.

Historical fact and dramatic characterization blend in King Henry VI, Part II, for Shakespeare showed the King to be a weak-willed, introspective

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<sup>15</sup> These tidings relate to our foreign transactions, the giving up of Maine, Truces, etc., etc. on the King's marriage which had taken place in November.

<sup>16</sup> Agnes Paston to Edmund Paston, 46, p. 58, Vol. I, February 1, 1445.

individual who escaped decisions by moralizing and who had not the daring to lead a nation. Only when hard pressed did he decree the Duke of Suffolk banished or challenged the Duke of York in his claims to the throne, and the final decisions were usually forced by his advisers. In the study of Henry VI it can be concluded that Shakespeare and the Paston contemporaries of the King were in agreement even to the possibility that there may have been dissension about the dowry of Queen Margaret. Shakespeare with Henry VI was a playwright and historian.

#### Conclusions

At the beginning of the present investigation two important questions were posed for study:

1. Were the individuals who wrote The Paston Letters in a position to know personally or by reputation the important figures mentioned by Shakespeare in King Henry VI, Part II, and were the Pastons capable of passing sound judgment upon the important public figures and important political issues of their day?
2. Upon the basis of the evidence brought to light, concerning the principal characters in King Henry VI, Part II, to what extent can Shakespeare be trusted as a historian?

With regard to the first question--Are The Paston Letters worth anything as a historical record?--the answer is an unequivocal "yes".

The Paston Letters are an unusually full, important, and authentic contemporary account of events in medieval English history from 1417 to 1503.

Concerning the second question--Upon the basis of evidence in King Henry VI, Part II, is Shakespeare a dependable historian?--the answer is also in the affirmative, but with some significant reservations.

Up to the present the significance of The Paston Letters for Shakespearean criticism has not received the consideration that it would seem to merit. It is true that in Lancastrian times discretion was the better part of valor; as a result, the politique Pastons, in keeping with the letter-writing style of the period, were not inclined to commit controversial questions to writing. On the other hand, as the numerous quotations show, the correspondence was filled with "tydynges" and if there was "gret talkyng" or any other unauthenticated news, it would generally be so labeled by the correspondent himself. What should be especially noted is that the Paston evidence is not hearsay. The Pastons knew whereof they spoke. When the Pastons wrote of the Dukes of Suffolk, Somerset, or York, they were not writing merely of persons who were prominent in the government; they were writing about people to whom they were related or with whom they had intimate personal or professional relations. Fuller mentions William Paston as one of the "worthies" of England; Anne, daughter of the Duke of Somerset,

married the uncle of Sir John Paston, the Paston correspondence contains letters from the Duke of York to John Paston relative to sheriffs and knights of the shire; and the Earl of Suffolk introduced into the Paston household one Richard Calle, who, much to the chagrin of the Pastons, married Margery, daughter of Margaret and John Paston. It may safely be assumed that The Paston Letters are entirely dependable original sources historically.

It may also be safely assumed that if the principal characters in Shakespeare's King Henry VI, Part II, are consistent with the characters as delineated in The Paston Letters, then William Shakespeare was a dependable historian. James Gairdner, editor of The Paston Letters, author of The Houses of Lancaster and York, and a standard authority upon the subject, is of the opinion that Shakespeare was a dependable historian. Gairdner prefaced his book of Lancaster and York maintaining:

For the period of English history treated in this volume, we are fortunate in possessing an unrivalled interpreter in our great dramatic poet, Shakespeare. A regular sequence of historical plays exhibit to us not only the general character of each successive reign, but nearly the whole chain of leading events, from the days of Richard II to the death of Richard III at Bosworth.

It is the contention of the present writer that Gairdner's conclusion can be accepted only with some rather important reservations. It is true that in the larger aspects of character delineation and motives, Shakespeare is historically accurate. For example, Queen



Margaret was energetic, violent, passionate, and unfeminine in her ambition; Henry VI showed cowardice, indecision, and dependence; the Duke of Gloucester did not always agree with the King and lords, yet he was competent and popular with the people; the Duke of York was a strong leader, diplomatic, but sometimes gullible; the Duke of Suffolk proposed unpopular policies, but was the King's favorite until he had to be banished for treason; the Duke of Somerset was determined to bring about York's downfall; the Earl of Warwick entertained lavishly and was popular with the people; Cardinal Beaufort was interested in money matters. But in every single instance exception must be taken to Shakespeare's characterizations, for the sake of historical accuracy. Shakespeare's sins of omission and commission may be classified into four different categories:

1. Historical information that has come to light since Shakespeare's day, and that materially affects the character as Shakespeare conceived it.
2. Contemporary historical information that Shakespeare did not know about as that he deliberately suppressed as dramatically detrimental to the character as he wished to present him.
3. Deliberate misstatement of fact because of dramatic exigencies.
4. Honest mistakes in Shakespeare's historical information.

With regard to the first exception--data that has come to light since Shakespeare's day--neither Shakespeare nor any of his sources ever directly accused Queen Margaret of treason, yet she seemed to have been guilty of that offence in inviting French forces to attack the English coast in 1457 under the leadership of Pierre de Breze to divert the Duke of York. In justice to Shakespeare, it is only fair to observe that had he known this fact he would probably have used it.

Concerning the second exception--the deliberate suppression of historical information because of dramatic exigency--attention may be called to events in the lives of the Duke of Gloucester, the Duke of Suffolk, and the Earl of Warwick. Shakespeare undoubtedly knew of Gloucester's very questionable marriage with Jaqueline of Hainault and his disgraceful relations with Eleanor Cobham before his marriage to her, for both of these episodes are treated in detail in Shakespeare's sources, the chronicles of Hall and Holinshed. One is forced to assume, therefore, that Shakespeare suppressed the facts because they would have interfered with his desire to picture the Lord Protector as "the Good Duke Humphrey".

It was quite likely that Shakespeare was not aware of the very touching letter which the Duke of Suffolk wrote to his son upon the eve of the Duke's arrest and banishment for treason. But it seems equally likely--in the light of his treatment of Gloucester--that Shakespeare,

at this stage of his development, would have suppressed this information because he was interested in making Suffolk thoroughly despicable.

In making the Earl of Warwick a devil-may-care character, the playwright suppressed Warwick's practical traits. It was he who saved the day for the Yorkists at St. Alban's, and who was successful militarily, politically, and financially.

With regard to the third exception--deliberate misstatement of historical fact for dramatic purposes--one might mention that it was not the Duke of York who was responsible for the victory at the first battle of St. Alban's. Historically, a year elapsed between York's return from Ireland and his march to the King. For dramatic purposes Shakespeare has York proceed directly to the capital immediately after his return from Ireland. In The Paston Letters there is no evidence that the Duke of York had any connection with the Jack Cade rebellion. However, it was to Shakespeare's advantage, dramatically, in building up a following for the Duke of York, to indicate that even the Commons were opposed to the Lancastrian rule.

With regard to the last exception--honest mistakes--it appeared that Shakespeare, like all the rest of us, was human and occasionally fell into an honest error. The genealogy of Edward III is very badly garbled in Shakespeare's original source, The First Part of the Contention, and Shakespeare straightens out the difficulty in King Henry VI, Part II, only to fall into an equally bad error concerning the Earls of March in King Henry IV, Part I, where he confused father and son.

In the light of the foregoing exceptions, it would appear that Shakespeare's historical information was not always accurate. It would seem best, therefore, to conclude that on broad questions of characterization and motivation, Shakespeare was rarely at fault, but that for historical details he can not be depended upon.

During the course of the present study two additional bodies of evidence have come to light, which, for the benefit of future investigation of the field, ought to be mentioned here, although they lie slightly outside the current thesis. The first body of data concerns Sir John Fastolf, from whom it is generally supposed that Shakespeare took the name of the greatest comic hero of all time--Sir John Falstaff. The second body of data deals with possible character sketches in King Henry VI, Part II, which developed into full-length portraits in some of Shakespeare's later plays.

In establishing the limits of investigation of the present thesis, it seemed advisable to confine the study to those characters that were common to The Paston Letters and to Shakespeare's King Henry VI, Part II. Unfortunately, Sir John Fastolf did not appear in King Henry VI, Part II, although references to him in The Paston Letters were frequent, and scholars particularly interested in the characters of King Henry VI, Part II, were likely to be equally interested in Fastolf, even if he did not happen to appear in this particular Shakespearean play.

It is generally conceded that the original Falstaff was Sir John Oldcastle, father of Eleanor Cobham, disgraced wife of Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester. It is also generally conceded that the representatives of the Cobham family of Shakespeare's day took such serious objection to Shakespeare's use of the name Oldcastle that he changed the name of Oldcastle to Falstaff, and avowed that although there was such a person as Sir John Oldcastle, Falstaff "was not the man". In lighting upon the name Falstaff from Fastolf, Shakespeare's choice seems not to have been a particularly happy one. Sir John Fastolf was a shrewd and practical business man of considerable means and political influence--nothing of the delightful scholar and glorified buffoon of Shakespeare's Falstaff. Fastolf was accused of cowardice during one of the English military expeditions in France, but the charge was never proved. At his death, Sir John Fastolf left enough capital to endow a college.

Concerning Shakespeare's development of preliminary sketches into full-length portraits, mention was made in the first paragraph of the current study that it was impossible to detain genius long enough to make a detailed study of its creative processes. The evolution of Shakespeare's heroes and heroines--although tremendously important--lies quite outside the limits established for the current study. However, for the benefit of those readers who are interested in the total, not merely the purely historical, aspects of the Shakespeare character problem, pertinent data on certain characters of King Henry VI, Part II, may not be entirely out



of order here.

In reading King Henry VI, Part II, one can hardly escape the impression that the devil-may-care Earl of Warwick was the first draft of Hotspur of King Henry IV, Part I; that the ambitious Queen Margaret was the first draft of Lady Macbeth; and that the godly but indecisive Henry VI--although with Brutus in Julius Caesar intervening--might have been an extremely shadowy first draft of Hamlet. It may be assumed a priori that if a character in one of the plays caught the public fancy, Shakespeare, in response to public demand, would exploit more fully the same character or the same type of character in a later play. It is generally conceded that this is what happened to Falstaff in The Merry Wives of Windsor; and whatever may be the motive, it cannot be denied that Warwick had much in common with Hotspur, Queen Margaret with Lady Macbeth, and Henry VI with Hamlet. In each instance, of course, the latter characterization is by far the better. By this technique and artistry he was to make his later plays the greatest in the English language!

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CRANE'S CREST

LITERARY REFERENCES IN THE PASTOR LETTERS TO THE  
CHARACTERS IN SHAKESPEARE'S KING HENRY VI, PART II

by

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AN ABSTRACT

MASTER OF SCIENCE

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## PROBLEM

The present study concerns itself with two major questions:

1. Were the individuals who wrote The Paston Letters in a position to know personally or by reputation the important figures mentioned by Shakespeare in King Henry VI, Part II, and were the Pastons capable of passing sound judgment upon the important public figures and important political issues of their day?
2. Concerning the principal characters in King Henry VI, Part II, to what extent can we trust Shakespeare at the outset of his career as a historian?

## METHOD

The more than 1000 Paston letters were read and tabulated, as they referred to the principal characters in Shakespeare's King Henry VI, Part II. Having determined the salient traits of each of the characters according to this original source, we then compared the contemporary portraits with those given by Shakespeare.

The history of the Paston family was given, showing them to be a dependable source, for William Paston was considered one of the "worthies" of England. When the Pastons wrote of the Dukes of Suffolk, Somerset, or York, they were writing about people to whom they were related or with whom they had intimate or professional relationships. The Paston evidence is not hearsay. If there is "gret talkyng" or any other



unauthenticated news, it will be so labeled. The correspondence is filled with "tydynges", which for the safety of the writer had to be facts. Also considered was the background of the War of the Roses, so the evidence could be seen in its proper perspective.

#### Content Material

Digressions in the characters of Shakespeare's play and The Paston Letters were considered. In the play Shakespeare ignored one facet of the Duke of Gloucester's character, omitting all reference to the Lord Protector's questionable marriages. In the same faction, the Earl of Warwick is presented as an impulsive, devil-may-care youth. To the Duke of York went the glory of winning the first battle of St. Alban's, but according to history, Warwick was the responsible general who won the day for York.

No reference was made in the play to the treason of Queen Margaret, but Gairdner presents evidence to prove she was ambitious to the point of betrayal. The Pastons included a letter from Suffolk to his son, showing him to be gentle and God-fearing, a trait of his character not presented in the play. The portrayal of Somerset is identical in King Henry VI, Part II, and The Paston Letters. King Henry VI is also similar in both sources.

#### Findings

In regard to the first question of the problem--Are The Paston Letters worth anything as a historical record?--the answer is yes.

As mentioned, William Paston was a "worthy" of England; Anne, daughter of the Duke of Somerset, married the uncle of Sir John Paston; the Paston correspondence contains letters from the Duke of York to John Paston relative to sheriffs and knights of the shire; and the Earl of Suffolk introduced into the Paston household one Richard Calle, who, much to the chagrin of the Pastons, married Margery, daughter of Margaret and John Paston.

Because of the position of the family, the letter-writing style of the period that controversial questions not be put to writing unless labeled "gret talkyng" or if authentic, "tydyngs", and because of their correspondence with the men concerned in this study, The Paston Letters are entirely dependable original sources historically.

As for the second question of the problem, James Gairdner, editor of The Paston Letters maintained that Shakespeare was a dependable historian. It is the contention of the present writer that Gairdner's conclusion can only be accepted with several reservations. Shakespeare was historically accurate in the larger aspects of character delineation and motives, but in every single instance, we have to take exception to Shakespeare's characters. His sins of omission and commission are fourfold:

1. Historical information that has come to light since Shakespeare's day, and that materially affects the character as Shakespeare conceived it.

2. Contemporary historical information that Shakespeare did not know about or that he deliberately suppressed as dramatically detrimental to a character as he wished to present him.
3. Deliberate misstatement of fact because of dramatic exigencies.
4. Honest mistakes in Shakespeare's historical information.

Regarding the first exception, neither Shakespeare nor any of his sources ever directly accused Queen Margaret of treason, yet she seems to have been guilty of that offence in inviting French forces to attack the English coast in 1457 under the leadership of Pierre de Breze to divert the Duke of York.

Concerning the second exception of the deliberate suppression of historical information because of dramatic exigency, attention may be called to the Duke of Gloucester, the Duke of Suffolk, and the Earl of Warwick. Shakespeare undoubtedly knew of Gloucester's very questionable marriage with Jacqueline of Hainault and his disgraceful relations with Eleanor Cobham before his marriage to her, for both of these episodes are treated in detail in Shakespeare's sources. These facts would have interfered with his "Good Duke Humphrey".

Although Shakespeare was probably not aware of Suffolk's touching letter to his son, he probably would have suppressed it, for he was interested in making Suffolk thoroughly despicable. In making the Earl of Warwick a devil-may-care character, the playwright suppressed Warwick's practical traits.

With regard to the deliberate mistatement of historical fact for dramatic purposes, one might mention that it was not the Duke of York who was responsible for the victory at the first battle of St. Alban's. According to The Paston Letters York was not connected with the Jack Cade rebellion. However, dramatically it was to Shakespeare's advantage to build up a following for York among the commons.

An honest mistake concerned the Earl of March, which was straightened out in King Henry VI, Part II, from The First Part of the Contention, and confused again in King Henry IV, Part I. The identity of the father and son was mistaken.

In the light of the foregoing exceptions, it would appear that Shakespeare's historical information is not always accurate. On broad questions of character and motivation, Shakespeare is rarely at fault, but that for historical details he cannot always be depended upon.

During the course of the present study two additional bodies of evidence have come to light, which ought to be mentioned here. The first body of data concerns Sir John Fastolf. Shakespeare changed the name of his delightful scholar and glorified buffoon to Falstaff, but in some ways he was a sharp contrast to Sir John Fastolf. According to the Pastons, Fastolf was a practical man of business, leaving enough capital at his death to endow a college. He was once accused of cowardice, like Falstaff, but the charge was never proved.

Other data lying outside this study but of interest is the development of preliminary sketches into full-length portraits. In reading King Henry VI, Part II, one can hardly escape the impression that the devil-may-care Earl of Warwick is the first draft of Hotspur in King Henry IV, Part I; that the ambitious Queen Margaret is the first draft of Lady Macbeth; and that the indecisive Henry VI may be a shadowy first draft of Hamlet. In each instance, of course, the latter character is by far the better.