

Edward the Fourth

OUR Edward the Fourth was a gay and voluptuous prince; and probably owed his crown to his handsomeness, his enormous debts, and passion for the fair sex. He had many Jane Shores. Honest Philip de Comines, his contemporary, says, "That what greatly contributed to his entering London as soon as he appeared at its gates was the great debts this prince had contracted, which made his creditors gladly assist him; and the high favour in which he was held by the *Bourgeoises*, into whose good graces he had frequently glided, and who gained over to him their husbands, who, I suppose, for the tranquillity of their lives, were glad to depose, or to raise monarchs.—Many ladies and rich citizens' wives, of whom formerly he had great privacies and familiar acquaintance, gained over to him their husbands and relations."

This is the description of his voluptuous life; we must recollect that the writer had been an eyewitness, and was an honest man; while modern historians only view objects through the colouring medium of their imagination.

"He had been during the last twelve years more accustomed to his ease and pleasure than any other prince who lived in his time. He had nothing in his thoughts

but *les dames*, and of them more than was *reasonable*; and hunting-matches, good eating, and great care of his person. When he went in their seasons to these hunting-matches, he always had carried with him great pavilions for *les dames*, and at the same time gave splendid entertainments; so that it is not surprising that his person was as jolly as any one I ever saw. He was then young, and as handsome as any man of his age; but he has since become enormously fat."

Since I have got old Philip in my hand, the reader will not, perhaps, be displeased, if he attends to a little more of his *naïveté*, which will appear in the form of a *conversazione* of the times. He relates what passed between Edward and the king of France.

"When the ceremony of the oath was concluded, our king, who was desirous of being friendly, began to say to the king of England, in a laughing way, that he must come to Paris, and be jovial amongst our ladies; and that he would give him the Cardinal de Bourbon for his confessor, who would very willingly absolve him of any sin which perchance he might commit. The king of England seemed well pleased at the invitation, and laughed heartily; for he knew that the said cardinal was *un fort bon compagnon*. When the king was returning, he spoke on the road to me; and said, that he did not like

to find the king of England so much inclined to come to Paris. 'He is,' said he, a very *handsome* king; he likes the women too much. He may, probably, find one at Paris that may make him like to come too often, or stay too long. His predecessors have already been too much at Paris and in Normandy; and that 'his company was not agreeable *this side of the sea*; but that, beyond the sea, he wished to be *bon frère et amy*.'"

I have called Philip de Comines *honest*. The old writers, from the simplicity of their style, usually receive this honourable epithet; but sometimes they deserve it as little as most modern memoir-writers. No enemy is indeed so terrible as a man of genius. Comines's violent enmity to the Duke of Burgundy, which appears in these Memoirs, has been traced by the minute researchers of anecdotes; and the cause is not honourable to the memoir-writer, whose resentment was implacable. De Comines was born a subject of the Duke of Burgundy, and for seven years had been a favourite; but one day returning from hunting with the Duke, then Count de Charolois, in familiar jocularities he sat himself down before the prince, ordering the prince to pull off his boots. The count laughed, and did this, but in return for Comines's princely amusement, dashed the boot in his face, and gave Comines a bloody nose. From that

time he was mortified in the court of Burgundy by the nickname of the *booted head*. Comines long felt a rankling wound in his mind; and after this family quarrel, for it was nothing more, he went over to the king of France, and wrote off his bile against the Duke of Burgundy in those "Memoirs," which give posterity a caricature likeness of that prince, whom he is ever censuring for presumption, obstinacy, pride, and cruelty. This Duke of Burgundy, however, it is said, with many virtues, had but one great vice, the vice of sovereigns, that of ambition!

The impertinence of Comines had not been chastised with great severity; but the nickname was never forgiven: unfortunately for the duke, Comines was a man of genius. When we are versed in the history of the times, we often discover that memoir-writers have some secret poison in their hearts. Many, like Comines, have had the boot dashed on their nose. Personal rancour wonderfully enlivens the style of Lord Orford and Cardinal de Retz. Memoirs are often dictated by its fiercest spirit; and then histories are composed from memoirs. Where is TRUTH? Not always in histories and memoirs!