

# Henry VII and the Creation Of Shakespeare's England

by Robert Trout

**A**bout six hundred years ago, a handful of individuals made a revolution in statecraft, with the creation of the institution of the sovereign nation-state. King Louis XI (r. 1464-85) established the first such nation-state in France. The second was established in England under Henry VII (Tudor), who reigned from 1485 to 1509.

These governments were monarchies, not republics. Most Americans think of a republic simply as the political form of self-government, with representatives selected through elections. But the establishment of self-government has always been a paradox. Are the people able to govern themselves? Good government is not simply the creation of good institutions: As Benjamin Franklin is reported to have warned his fellow-citizens after the Constitutional Convention, they had a republic, only if they "could keep it."

The plays of William Shakespeare were a continuation of the process set in motion by Henry VII and the circle of Renaissance humanists led by Erasmus of Rotterdam and his friend Thomas More, to create a true republic in England, through the education of the population in the principles of statecraft required for self-government. The effort was not realized in England, however, nor in Europe, but ultimately, in the founding of the United States of America.



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England's  
King Henry VII  
(r. 1485-1509).

**P**rior to the establishment of the English nation-state under Henry VII, some 95 percent of the population lived in conditions little better than cattle. Serfs worked the land using agricultural techniques that were little changed from generation to generation, and which had actually deteriorated over the preceding two centuries. At the time of Henry's accession in 1485, the population of England was approximately 2.25 million people, fewer than it had been two centuries earlier; the average life expectancy was little more than thirty years.

In the Fifteenth century, prior to the reign of Henry VII, England was dominated by a feudality of approximately sixty powerful families, head-

ed by hereditary barons. These lords often controlled substantial territory, where they exerted more power than the king's own bureaucracy or civil service.

Below this nobility were the gentry of England, some 6,000-9,000 gentlemen, esquires, and knights, who were given land, money, and position in exchange for service, especially military service. The Duke of Buckingham, for example, had no fewer than 2,000 such retainers in 1454.<sup>1</sup> The English kings, captive of this feudal structure, possessed little military power independent of the feudal lords, who used their private armies for private warfare and revolt for their own ends.

The Plantagenet dynasty, founded by Henry II of the Norman-French House of Anjou, seized the English throne in 1154 and ruled England until the accession of Henry Tudor in 1485. The centuries of Plantagenet rule were a period defined by early attempts in Europe to create the nation-state, against opposition by Venice and its Plantagenet allies.

Through its domination of trade and banking, Venice maintained a stranglehold over the economy of Europe. Attempts by rulers such as Frederick II Hohenstaufen in Sicily and King Alfonso X (the Wise) in Spain to establish nations, were viewed as a threat to Venetian power. The Venetians encouraged warfare to block these efforts, repeatedly deploying the military power of the Plantagenets to achieve their ends.

During the Thirteenth century, the usurious practices of the Venetian financiers caused severe economic contraction, setting off financial disintegration by the 1340's. The social collapse and Black Death which followed killed off more than a third of the European population.

In 1337, the Plantagenet King Edward II launched a war against France that would last for more than a hundred years. Rampaging English armies carried out vicious pillaging, severely depopulating the country. It was almost a century later, in 1429, that the French peasant girl Joan of Arc presented herself to lead the French armies. Under her leadership, the French were able to retake Rheims and crown the French Dauphin as king. Although the French would later adopt an appeasement policy and end the offensive, Joan's intervention was a crucial inspiration to the founding of the French nation under Louis XI.

The English position in France continued to deteriorate. In 1449-50, a French offensive, using superior cannon—the result of French advances in metallurgy—succeeded in blasting the English out of sixty castles. In a period of one year, English control of France completely collapsed.

After England had suffered this ignominious defeat,

the allied noble families turned on each other in fratricidal civil war—the “Wars of Roses.” The English crown was contested for by the opposing Houses of Lancaster and York.

The ensuing period of violence did great damage to England. As Shakespeare describes it in his *Tragedy of King Richard III*, every atrocity became the justification for another, leading to a vicious circle of revenge and bloodletting. However, this also greatly weakened the feudal nobility, reducing the number of feudal lords by almost half, and making it possible for Henry VII later to consolidate the power of the central government.

## Shakespeare's Platonic Dialogues

Following the murder of Christopher Marlowe in 1593, William Shakespeare became the leading playwright of England. He launched his career in 1592 with a trilogy of plays on Henry VI which became immensely popular.

During his career, Shakespeare wrote plays covering the history of England from King John (1199-1216) to King Henry VIII (1509-1547). These plays centered on a series of great crises, resulting from the question of the legitimacy of the rulers and the kingly succession. These were pressing issues at the time, as the nation's political leadership pondered who would succeed Queen Elizabeth I.

Shakespeare demonstrated how these crises resulted from the failure of the flawed axioms governing the behavior of both England's rulers and her population. He used the history plays to develop for the audience the recognition that there exists a higher law, than the written law of the land—a higher law, to which the rule of feudal factions must give way. Shakespeare repeatedly showed that the refusal of nations and rulers to act according to this higher law, brought inescapable consequences for even the most powerful.

Shakespeare portrayed the Plantagenet dynasty as laboring under a curse of illegitimacy, which passed from generation to generation. The fundamental axiom of the Plantagenet reign—rule by a nobility that rejects responsibility for the common good—placed every successive regime in the inevitably downward trajectory.

But Shakespeare was confronted with another set of axioms to overthrow—those of the population, whom he sought to uplift. How does one generate in the mind of the audience, its identity as citizens of a republic? Each member of society must be shaped by a new axiom, the higher (natural) law that must form the direction of government. Then, government is no longer rule by force, but instead, a dialogue between the governing and the

governed, over how the nation can best follow the precepts of natural law to promote the General Welfare. Self-government flows from this principle.

Shakespeare's plays gave his audiences the chance to look over the shoulders of previous rulers, and witness how their failures led to tragic consequences, not merely for themselves, but for the kingdom as a whole. Through this process, where the audience was engaged in a dialogue with the history of its own nation, a population that had little concept of self-government, was brought to create within its own minds the qualities necessary for self-government.

In his essay, "A Philosophy for Victory: Can We Change the Universe?," Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr., addresses the question of how the playwright accomplishes this.<sup>2</sup> The Classical stage does not present a literal portrayal of all the events that have occurred. So, the Chorus in the Prologue to Shakespeare's *Henry V*, informs us that we must imagine the clashing of armies, where we see only a handful of men. The goal of the playwright must be to create a truthful representation of *the idea underlying the events*. LaRouche states that "the composer must . . . create on stage the idea which may not correspond exactly, in every detail introduced, to the actual history, but corresponds, with historical truthfulness, to the essence of the historical reality referenced."

By generating such "Platonic ideas" in the minds of his audience, Shakespeare engaged them in the intellectual exercise necessary to qualify them as citizens. It is the ability of the citizenry to replicate this process of generating ideas, which makes republican government function, since competent statecraft requires a voluntarist approach to changing the axioms governing policy-making. The development of the concept of free will, or the ability of an individual to intervene to effect an advance in civilization, arises from developing in the individual the ability to generate just such ideas within his own mind.

The republican circles around Henry VII's younger contemporaries, Erasmus of Rotterdam and Thomas More, undertook as their ultimate goal the transformation of the population into a republican citizenry. And Shakespeare's plays were one of the most powerful tools in accomplishing this mass education of the population.

## Henry VII's Background

Little is known about Henry Tudor's education, either in England or in France. However, one of his tutors, Andreas Scotus, an Oxford teacher, is reported to have

said of him, "Never have I seen a boy of such quickness, so capable of learning, at that age."<sup>3</sup>

Henry cannot have missed the dramatic changes taking place around him in France. While England was being destroyed by infighting among the feudal lords, France's dramatic development under Louis XI, where the conscious promotion of industry, science, and technology enabled the nation to double its output in twenty-two years, demonstrated the successful nature of the new institution, the nation-state.

Henry's father died before he was born, and, for much of his life, he was under the care of his uncle, Jasper Tudor, who had been an honored guest at the court of Louis XI. Jasper Tudor first fled England in 1461, traveling to Louis XI's court, where Louis made him a member of his household. Jasper returned to England to aid in the restoration of Henry VI in 1470; when Henry VI was deposed again in 1471, he again fled England, this time taking his nephew Henry with him.

Several contemporary commentaries were written about Henry Tudor's character. Polydore Virgil, an Italian who settled in England and wrote a history of the period, said of him: "His spirit was distinguished, wise and prudent; his mind was brave and resolute and never, even at moments of greatest danger, deserted him. He had a most pertinacious memory. Withal he was not devoid of scholarship. . . . He was gracious and kind and was as attentive to his visitors as he was easy of access. His hospitality was splendidly generous; he was fond of having foreigners at his court and freely conferred favors on them. . . . He was most fortunate in war, although he was constitutionally more inclined to peace than to war. He cherished justice above all things; as a result he vigorously punished violence, manslaughter and every other kind of wickedness whatsoever."<sup>4</sup> The Milanese ambassador praised Henry's inherent cautiousness, his tendency to deal openly and fairly with others, and his willingness to consider all sides of important questions.

## Governing 'After the French Fashion'

In 1485, after Henry Tudor's forces landed in England and defeated Richard III at the Battle of Bosworth on August 22, he was crowned King Henry VII. Henry acted quickly to consolidate power. He married Elizabeth, daughter of Edward IV of the opposing House of York, for the purpose of ending the wars between the two opposing Houses.

Neither revenge nor weakness disfigured the first months of the reign. The past years of bloodthirsty vio-

lence were forgotten. Following the Battle of Bosworth, Henry pardoned virtually all those who had fought against him. An Italian wrote to the Pope in December, 1485: “The king shows himself very prudent and clement: all things appear disposed towards peace.”<sup>5</sup> Thus, an uprising in the north collapsed after Henry offered pardon to all who laid down their arms.

The Spanish ambassador reported that Henry VII showed a desire to “govern England after the French fashion”<sup>6</sup>—i.e., the fashion of Louis XI. He rapidly consolidated power in himself, while surrounding himself with a council of men, drawn largely from the middle classes, who shared his commitment to establishing a nation-state dedicated to the General Welfare of the entire population, rather than rule of the nobility. At no

## The Magna Carta Versus the Nation-State

Although the Magna Carta is claimed to be one of the first documents that established the traditions leading to the founding of republican government in the United States, the opposite is the case. The Magna Carta, imposed on the English king in 1215 by feudal barons, was a charter establishing the rights of the nobility, against the efforts of the monarch to rule a unified nation.

The document contained guarantees that the king will not force the nobles to carry out internal improvements such as constructing bridges. It demanded that the king practice free trade, by prohibiting the government from imposing tariffs and controlling trade. Finally, the Magna Carta gave the lords the right to set up their members as a court that could over rule decisions of the king. If the king did not accede to the decisions of this court, the lords could carrying out acts of revolt, violence and pillage, short of murdering the king and his family: “those . . . barons shall, together with the community of the whole land, distrain and distress us (the King) in all possible ways, namely, by seizing our castles, lands, possessions, and in any other way they can, until redress had been obtained as they deem fit, saving harmless our own person, and the persons of our queen and children;” Unstated in the Magna Carta, is that the vast majority of the population had no rights, as these feudal lords set themselves as a law unto themselves. —RT

period of English history were the nobles more conspicuous at court, yet at no period did they have less real power, than during Henry VII’s reign.

John Morton, who played a key role in organizing the conspiracy to bring Henry Tudor to power, was Henry VII’s most senior advisor throughout his life. Morton had been born in 1420 and had studied at Oxford. He had risen to high positions in both the church and government under Kings Henry VI and Edward IV, although he was jailed by Richard III. Being a man of great integrity, intelligence, and vision, Morton would openly disagree with Henry VII, which won the king’s respect, rather than resentment. Indicative of his outlook, was Morton’s undertaking, when he was Bishop of Ely, to drain the fens between Wisbech and Peterborough; he also constructed a dike and waterway to the sea for barges and small craft.

Morton helped educate the young Thomas More, who lived in Morton’s household. More later said of Morton, “In his face did shine such an amiable reverence as was pleasant to behold, gentle in communication, yet earnest and sage. He had great delight many times with rough speech to his suitors to prove, but without harm, what prompt wit and what bold spirit were in every man. In his speech he was fine, eloquent, and pithy. . . . In the law he had profound knowledge, in wit he was incomparable, and in memory wonderful excellent.”<sup>7</sup>

Henry was also joined in France by Richard Fox, who became another key advisor. Born in approximately 1448, Fox studied first at Cambridge, and then in Paris, where he joined Henry. He came the closest to being the king’s Foreign Minister, negotiating many key treaties, and was involved in promoting the Renaissance “New Learning” in England, as we shall see below.

Henry VII rapidly and firmly took up the duties of the monarchy, restoring order and checking waste. He raised the crown far above the nobles, and formed an alliance with the middle class, acting through their representatives in the House of Commons, who feared the return of the days of civil war, and realized that their survival and livelihood was dependent on the king’s protection. Thus, Henry drew his strength from the loyalty of the common classes, not from the feudal nobility.

Henry VII introduced a fundamental change in the conception of law in England. He consciously acted to replace the arbitrary rule of the nobility, typified by the Magna Carta, for example, with reforms that made everyone legally accountable, regardless of his station. Only months after being crowned, Henry moved against the lawlessness of the feudal nobility, ordering an oath to be taken in Parliament, by the Lords and members of the House of Commons, on Nov. 19,

1485, “for the reform of divers crimes and enormities.” By the terms of the oath, they swore not to “receive aid, or comfort murderers, felons, or outlaws, not to reteine any man by indenture, or other, not to give liverie, signe, or token contrary to law, or take, cause to be made, or assent to any maintenance, imbracerie, riotts, or unlawful assemblie, not to hinder the execution of royal writs, nor lett any known felon to bail or mainprise.”<sup>8</sup>

Henry VII outlawed livery, and the maintenance of private armies. The armed bands who, wearing their feudal badges, had overawed the countryside, intimidated sheriffs, and bullied juries, now had their days numbered. Putting an end to the brigandage of the nobility required numerous statutes, since the feudal lords did not readily give up the practice of private war. But, by the end of Henry’s reign, the typical English nobleman had been forced into other occupations than the medieval ones of riot and civil war.

Henry created a centralized judicial system, with a system for appeal of cases. By an Act passed in 1495, machinery by which appeal from the verdict of a jury might be made was established. The effect of these centralizing statutes can hardly be exaggerated, as they introduced efficient local administration. To accomplish this, the King enlisted many minor members of the country gentry in his service, who became the props of the Tudor throne. Henry also created the Court of Requests, a poor man’s court of equity, where the poor could sue without payment of fees, and were given free legal aid. Statutes were passed to protect the poor from injustice, and to penalize dishonest juries.

In November 1487, the Star Chamber Act created the Star Chamber as a court of appeals for those who were unable to get justice in courts controlled by the nobles. This Act allowed members of the King’s Council to form themselves into a court, and hold judicial sessions in the Star Chamber. This “Council in Star Chamber” usually consisted of seven or eight bishops, along with several other councillors. Virtually every one of the three hundred cases heard during Henry’s reign was initiated by private suit, and not by government process. The most frequent complaint addressed to the Council, was that defendants had come riotously, with force of arms, and evicted the plaintiff from his house or land. The sentences were remarkably humane. (This Court, which began as a place where the weak could appeal cases that had been rigged by the nobility, degenerated in less able hands into a weapon of cruelty, and finally perished in well-earned ignominy. Under Cardinal Wolsey, it evolved into the “Court of Star Chamber,” which existed until its abolition by the Long Parliament in 1641.)

Henry VII’s reforms had the effect of transforming the judicial system, from one dominated by the whims of the nobility, to one based on a system of law, grounded in a commitment to the General Welfare. However, unlike the United States, England has never had a written constitution, not even to this day. There has never been an English Solon, or an English Constitutional Convention, as America’s founders held in Philadelphia in 1787. Instead, the English Constitution consists of a body of statutory law, customs, and judicial interpretations; it is frequently called a customary or unwritten constitution. Consequently, many of the reforms introduced by Henry were reversed by the Venetian financial oligarchy, as it gained control over England during the following centuries. The role Henry defined for the monarch, as a strong chief executive of the nation, with the commitment and power to promote the General Welfare, was destroyed. Instead, the British monarch became the equivalent of a Venetian doge, or chief executive of the aristocracy. It was only with the founding of the United States of America, by men who were heirs to the best traditions of England, and Europe overall, that a nation was brought into being whose written Constitution explicitly stated the commitment to “promote the General Welfare” for the citizens and their posterity, with institutions designed to carry out this task.

## Economic Development for the Common Good

Under Henry VII, England experienced a fundamental shift from feudalism, to a policy of government-directed economic development, based on a conscious design to promote the General Welfare. Henry’s reform of the economic system, while not complete, laid the basis for transforming England into a modern nation. He strove to increase the productivity of the population through government-directed improvements in infrastructure, technology, and the living standards and productivity of the population.

The description of Henry’s policies as the “Mercantile System,” a name given them by later opponents, does not adequately convey the actual commitment to the improvement in the conditions of life for the common man. The Crown drew to itself more and more power. But, this great expansion of central control was almost uniformly beneficent in effect, as it was in intention. Author Gladys Temperley writes, “We cannot point to a single one of Henry’s commercial statutes that was designed to forward any selfish interests of the king or his advisers.”<sup>9</sup>

Henry VII's economic policies fostered the development of England's nascent shipbuilding, iron, and cloth industries. Henry commissioned England's first blast furnace in 1496. **Below:** Page from William Gilbert's "De Magnete," England's first great scientific treatise, extols the productive value of iron for manufacturing.



Regulation of foreign trade and development of the merchant fleet resulted from the Navigation Act of 1489. The government subsidized construction of merchant ships to bolster the Navy in times of crisis.



Henry placed an export duty on undressed wool to encourage domestic cloth manufacturing. **Right:** Sixteenth-century weaving and dyeing.



Henry made the centralized government of the state the final arbiter of all economic policy decisions. For example, a series of Acts were passed controlling the craft guilds in particular instances. Even more significant was the step taken in 1504, when the guilds were brought under the control of the courts by an Act declaring that no guild regulation could be binding until it had been approved by the Chancellor, the Treasurer, the chief justices of the Kings Bench and Common Pleas, or the judges on circuit.

The modern conception of a corporation, as a legal individual, whose existence was created and determined by the government, was developed during Henry's reign. The issuance of patents for new inventions—a spur to technological advance—was begun in this period.

Another of Henry's first acts as king was to separate the expenses of the royal household from the revenues of the state. The fact that previous kings had made no such distinction, reflects their outlook: that the kingdom was, in effect, their personal property. Henry was the first English king in a century to be solvent, something he achieved through careful management, and by limiting wasteful expenses. The kings of France and

the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V had incomes ten times larger, but squandered their money on expensive wars.

During his reign, Henry VII implemented a series of monetary policy measures. A new coinage was issued to ensure a standard currency, and weights and measures were standardized. Henry also accumulated a large treasury, strengthening him against rebellion and invasion, since potential opponents knew he did not lack the financial means to defend himself. By an Act of 1487, Henry outlawed usury: the Act was to restrain the "dampnable bargayns groundyt in usurye, colorde by the name of newe Chevesaunce, contrarie to the lawe of naturell justis, to the comon hurt of this land."<sup>10</sup>

The national government also arrogated to itself the right to control prices and regulate wages. It is no exaggeration to say that by the end of his reign, the influence of Henry VII touched the lives of his subjects at almost every point. The idea that the central government had the right and the responsibility to regulate economic activity for the purpose of promoting the common good, had become firmly rooted as the governing principle of the nation.

**Regulating Foreign Trade.** Henry mandated state control of foreign trade, for the purpose of promoting national economic development. Much of his legislation was designed in a protectionist spirit. The development of both a navy and a merchant marine were central to the kingdom's military and economic security. The merchant fleet would supplement the small royal Navy, as well as allow England to control its own trade.

The prior state of affairs, inherited by Henry at his accession, seemed almost hopeless. The merchant fleet, like everything else, had decayed, and foreign ships carried the sea-borne trade of England. In addition, trade was severely hindered by the insecurity of the roads and the sea, as well as by constant warfare.

One of Henry's first acts to control the nation's foreign trade, was the passage of the Navigation Act in 1489. The Preamble of the Act noted that the fleet was so decayed, that England would soon lack the power and ability to defend herself.<sup>11</sup> This temporary Act forbade the importation of wine or wood from Guienne or Gascony, except on English, Irish, or Welsh ships, manned by their sailors. It was renewed in 1490, during which interval Henry had succeeded in obtaining a share of the carrying trade in Italian wine. This law mandated that no foreign ship could be freighted in an English port, while an English ship remained unladen. Although the Navigation Acts may have hindered England's foreign trade at first, by the end of Henry's reign the English merchant fleet was flourishing. Customs duties increased by 28 percent.

**The Cloth Industry.** Central to Henry VII's economic policy was the promotion of English manufactures. Although many of his laws continued those previously implemented by Edward IV, Henry's policy was motivated by a clear principle, from which he designed a coherent plan. His efforts met with considerable success.

The most prominent of these efforts was Henry's treatment of the wool trade and the cloth industry. Henry placed an export duty—in some cases, as high as 70 percent—on the export of undressed wool, to encourage the development of a native cloth industry. Meanwhile, the duty on exported cloth was never higher than nine percent of its value. A 1489/90 statute gave English cloth-makers the right to buy wool, before it could be exported. A statute of King Edward's was re-enacted, forbidding the export of unrowed and unshorn cloth, whereby "outlandish nacions with the same dapry arne sette on labour and occupacion to their greate enriching, and the kynges true liegemen . . . for lake of such occupacion dailly fall in great number to ydelnes and povertie."<sup>12</sup>

**Transformation of the Iron Industry.** Henry's army is reported to have had a significant number of cannon at the victorious Battle of Bosworth, an emphasis undoubtedly learned from the French, who used them against the English with devastating effectiveness to end the Hundred Years' War. In 1449-50, the French had conducted sixty successful siege operations in one year, using powerful cannon to blast the English out of their French holdings. The manufacture of these cannon was made possible by advances in the French iron industry, such that, by the end of the Fifteenth century, French cannon had acquired a high international reputation, owing to their splendid quality, rapidity of firing, and use of cast-iron shot, rather than stone balls.

French production of iron cannon was made possible through the development of the blast furnace, which was able to heat iron above its melting point, so that the metal could be poured into molds. (Using previous methods, iron products were manufactured at temperatures below the melting point, a much less efficient process.) The new blast-furnace method, which increased productivity fifteen-fold and made possible a much broader range of products, represented a tremendous advance in a technology that was key to the expansion of industry overall.

Henry VII was the first English king to manufacture iron cannon, based on his commissioning the first blast furnaces in England. In so doing, he revolutionized the English iron industry, laying the basis for the transformation of the English economy in the following centuries. The first blast furnace was set up by Henry in 1496 on royal land, to manufacture cannon balls as part of preparations to defend England from Scottish invasion. Shortly thereafter, cast-iron cannon were produced.

Henry also increased the number of gunners in royal service. They numbered 30 in 1489; by 1497, there were 49 gunners at the Tower of London alone. Many were foreign nationals, many French. These gunners were not only artillerymen, but also experts in shot and gun founding. Although Henry's cannon were produced to defend the nation from foreign invaders, the existence of such a stockpile, capable of reducing any feudal castle, served as a powerful deterrent to England's quarrelsome feudal nobility.

**Creation of the Navy.** Henry VII created a national Army, centralizing control over the military and ending the power of the nobility to make war. Central to this effort was the development of the Navy.

When Henry ascended the throne, only four ships were owned by the Crown, and pirates roamed the Channel unchecked. Henry built three large men-o'-war,

which became the nucleus of the Navy. The “Harry Grace a Dieu,” was a 1,000-ton, four-masted ship, with about seventy guns and a crew of 700. Many of the guns were manufactured in England. The government also subsidized the construction of merchant ships, under an agreement that these ships could be hired into the Navy in time of crisis.

The city of Portsmouth was developed as a fortified naval station, capable of meeting the needs of a permanent navy. The first drydock in the British Isles was also constructed at Portsmouth, which was ready for use by May 1496.

Central to the long-term success of Henry VII’s program, was the increase in the merchant marine encouraged by the Navigation Acts, because the increase in overseas trade demanded the maintenance of a strong navy.

**Foreign Policy for Peace.** Henry VII took great interest in foreign affairs. In 1497, the Milanese ambassador reported that Henry was so well informed about events in Italy, “that we have told him nothing new.” Even the courtiers knew so much about Italian affairs, that the ambassador fancied himself at Rome.

Only once did Henry fight a war on foreign soil, when he sought to contain the ambitions of France’s Charles VII, which presented a threat to England. However, Henry signed the Treaty of Etaples with Charles in 1492, in which he gave up the English claim to the French throne. Never again did Henry take up arms outside Britain, and his policy was consistently to promote peace among the other nations of Europe. This was a great benefit to England, as the nation could concentrate on its economic development, while the rulers of France, Spain, and other nations squandered tremendous resources on wars which often weakened them.

## Launching the English Renaissance

Henry VII surrounded himself with men who promoted the Renaissance’s “New Learning.” The King himself was clearly fascinated by the political and cultural life of the main Italian states, and during his reign, the English court was a more interesting and cosmopolitan place, than it was to be in the time of his successor. Foreign scholars were likely to receive a warm welcome, and Henry was also the leading patron of English writers and poets.

Henry’s interest in the arts was widely recognized, and a knowledge of the Classics was regarded as an avenue to royal favor, encouraging others to master the Renaissance learning. Erasmus reported in 1505, that London had eclipsed both Oxford and Cambridge, and had become

the country’s most important educational center, where “there are . . . five or six men who are accurate scholars in both tongues [Greek and Latin], such as I think even Italy itself does not at present possess.”

After studying in England, most of these scholars travelled to Italy, to master the new Platonic learning. Thomas Linacre, for example, was hired by Henry upon his return from Italy around 1500, first as a tutor to his elder son Arthur, and then as the King’s personal physician. Linacre later became the first president of the Royal College of Physicians, which was incorporated in 1518. William Grocyn travelled to Italy to be educated, and on his return initiated the teaching of Greek at Oxford.

One leading royal patron of education was Lady Margaret Beaufort, the King’s mother. She has been described as “more nearly the typical ‘man of the Renaissance’ than her son,” and even though her “influence and endowments were . . . religious rather than secular, they were outward looking and humanist, never scholastic.”<sup>13</sup> Lady Margaret was the only woman whose advice the King ever sought or heeded.

Margaret was only fourteen when her son Henry was born. She died in 1509, outliving her son by several months. As a child, she was taught reading, writing, and French. Her tutors remarked on her intelligence. She desired to learn Greek and Latin, but her mother refused to hire a tutor to educate her in the languages that were reserved for men who joined the clergy. As an adult, she completed an English translation of Thomas à Kempis’ *The Imitation of Christ*, which had been begun by William Atkinson, as well as translating another religious work.

Lady Margaret promoted the education of the entire population. She was a devout Christian, who championed the preaching of simple but eloquent sermons, which would uplift even the lowliest churchgoer. She promoted the printing of books, and was a leading patron of the first English printer, William Caxton, and his successor.

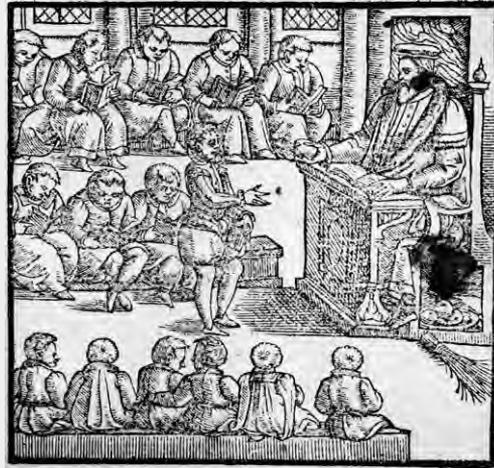
In 1494, Margaret met John Fisher, a friend and collaborator of Erasmus, who was to be her lifelong confidant, counsellor, and companion. Fisher became the Bishop of Winchester, and Chancellor of Cambridge University. He encouraged Margaret to patronize projects that promoted the New Learning. As a result, she supported the founding of two colleges at Cambridge, Jesus College in 1497, and St. John’s College after her death in 1509, through a grant in her will. St. John’s, which opened in 1516, became the leading college at Cambridge for the next thirty years.

Another patron of education was Bishop Richard Fox, the man who played a key role in Henry VII’s foreign



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Margaret Beaufort, mother of Henry VII, was a patron of the New Learning.



Desiderius Erasmus (of Rotterdam) (top right) led the scholars who launched the English Renaissance. In addition to Thomas More, Erasmus's collaborators included Thomas Linacre (far right), John Colet (right), and William Lily, whose 1557 "Short Introduction to Grammar" (left) was used in schools up to the Nineteenth century. Above: A Tudor schoolroom, 1573.



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policy. In 1517, Fox and Hugh Oldham, Bishop of Exeter, founded Corpus Christi College, whose statutes set out in detail a humanist curriculum. Initially, Fox had wished to found a college to educate clergy in the New Learning, but ultimately, the college accepted students destined for secular employment.

Although Henry and his circle favored the New Learning, the universities remained dominated by medieval scholasticism. The efforts of Henry and his circle were ultimately successful, however, as they opened the door for a circle of scholars associated with Erasmus of Rotterdam to create a revolution in education, which led to the great flowering of culture and the English economy during the next hundred years.

## The Erasmus Circle

The central figure in the circle that launched the English Renaissance was Erasmus of Rotterdam.<sup>14</sup> Born to poor parents in Holland in 1467, Erasmus was educated by the Brotherhood of the Common Life, a teaching order modelled on à Kempis' *Imitation of Christ*, that took in poor, but promising children. Several of his teachers inspired

him to dedicate his life to the promotion of Platonist Classical learning.

Erasmus became the leading humanist thinker of his age, and his name was a household word throughout educated Europe. He published his first work, the *Adages*, in 1500. Works such as *In Praise of Folly* and *The Handbook of the Militant Christian* become enormously popular, precisely at the moment when printing was coming into vogue. His works spread far and wide, and played an important role in promoting literacy throughout Europe.

Among Erasmus's key collaborators in England were Thomas More (1478-1535) and John Colet (1467-1519). They were the nucleus of a small group of Classically educated scholars, formed during the reign of Henry VII, who dedicated themselves to creating a Renaissance that would usher in an age where society would be governed by reason. Colet was the son of a London mercer, who was Lord Mayor in 1486 and 1495. He travelled to Italy, where he became a fervent promoter of Platonism. More was the son of a London lawyer. He studied Greek and Platonic philosophy at Oxford, and became a key leader of the English Renaissance during

the reign of Henry VIII.

These scholars proceeded from the idea that, since man's nature was to be made in the image of God, he could comprehend God's nature through reason. They rejected the stultifying, Aristotelian logic of the scholastics, whose commentaries dominated theology, and sought instead to reintroduce the writings of the early Church Fathers and the New Testament itself, in which they recognized an outlook coherent with Platonic philosophy. For example, in his *Praise of Folly*, Erasmus attacked the Schoolmen for completely missing the central message of Christianity on faith and charity, as stated by St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 13, that all displays of piety are false, unless they are motivated by charity or *agapē*. Erasmus satirized the methods of the scholastics, arguing that the most important sections of the Epistles of the Apostle Paul failed to meet their standards. Erasmus said: "Paul could present faith. But when he said, 'Faith is the substance of thing hoped for, the evidence of things not seen,' he did not define it doctorally. The same apostle, though he exemplified charity to its utmost, divided and defined it with very little logical skill in the First Epistle to the Corinthians, Chapter 13."<sup>15</sup>

Erasmus both promoted and used the method of Socratic dialogue in his writings. In his *Handbook of the Militant Christian*, he demonstrated that the Christian must look beyond sense certainty, to the realm of Platonic ideas. Through this, man can escape the temptations of the flesh, and rise to the spiritual realm. Erasmus says: "Creep not upon the earth, my brother, like an animal. Put on those wings which Plato says are caused to grow on the soul by the ardor of love. Rise above the body to the spirit, from the visible to the invisible, from the letter to the mystical meaning, from the sensible to the intelligible, from the involved to the simple."<sup>16</sup>

Erasmus, Colet, and More championed the use of education to transform citizens into the equivalent of Plato's "philosopher king," and sought to bring such men into governing positions in society. A recurrent theme in Erasmus's writings is, that true nobility is based on transforming oneself through learning, so that one's behavior is guided by reason, to seek to do the good. This could be achieved by bringing the Platonic method to children, through schooling in the Classics.

Erasmus first travelled to England during the reign of Henry VII, in 1499. At Oxford, he found John Colet lecturing on the Epistles of Paul. The lectures were well attended, as they rejected the scholastics' Aristotelian method. Colet brought out the coherence of Paul's Epistles with the philosophy of Plato.

The work of Colet and others in bringing this approach to Oxford and Cambridge Universities was

very controversial, and was only possible because of the support of both Henry VII and later Henry VIII. The universities continued to be dominated largely by the old scholastic methods, however. Therefore, Erasmus and his collaborators set out to recruit a new generation, by introducing the Platonist method of education.

The circle around Erasmus, More, and Colet began to establish schools which became models for the transformation of the educational system. Around 1510, More set up a school in his home, where he taught his own and other children. More's three daughters were famous examples that girls could become highly educated.

During the last years of the reign of Henry VII, Colet finalized plans for a school based on Platonist methods of education. In 1510, Henry VIII granted a license to establish St. Paul's School, which became the model for the reorganization of the English grammar schools throughout the country.

Colet asked Erasmus to become the first headmaster of St. Paul's. When Erasmus declined, Colet selected William Lily, who had studied at Oxford and in Italy. Lily had also travelled to Rhodes to learn Greek.

When Colet asked Erasmus to write a curriculum for the new school, Erasmus produced *De Ratione Studii (Concerning the Aim and Method of Education)*, which stressed that language should be learned, not as a collection of grammatical rules, but as it is spoken. It must be mastered by studying the greatest authors in Greek and Latin.

Erasmus wrote a series of dialogues and exercises, aimed at teaching language. His *De Copia* and *Colloquies*, or dialogues, were designed to educate students in language as it was spoken, rather than as written text. Erasmus designed these as Platonic dialogues. Indeed, Colet rejected the teaching of logic, because he recognized would it stultify the mind.

Lily, Colet, and Erasmus collaborated in drafting a grammar textbook. By 1542, this text had been adopted as the official Latin Grammar used throughout the schools in England. Its use continued up through the Eighteenth century, and, in a modified form, in many schools even into the Twentieth.

St. Paul's School had many detractors, and in a letter to Colet, More wrote that some opposed St Paul's, because it was serving as a Trojan horse which would bring forth those who would expose their ignorance. The school was defended by Henry VIII's court circles, which continued to promote the transformation of education that had been launched by Henry VII. During Henry VIII's reign, numerous schools were established on the model of St. Paul's, whose method of instruction increasingly became the standard for English grammar schools in general.

The transformation and expansion of the educational system led to a dramatic increase in literacy. By 1615, following the end of the Tudor dynasty with the death of Elizabeth I in 1603, the literacy level in England had reached around 33 percent, one of the highest rates in the world. This was considerably higher than France, where the literacy rate was only around 20 percent at that time.<sup>17</sup>

The Erasmian educational system, and the emphasis on education, was brought to America by the Massachusetts Puritans. Erasmus's *Colloquies* was brought by the English colonists to America, where it was used throughout the grammar schools of New England. By the time of the American Revolution, the literacy rate in New England was approximately 90 percent, the highest in the world, and a key factor in why the American colonists were able to make the Revolution.

## Thomas More and Henry VIII

When Henry VII died on April 21, 1509, he left England dramatically transformed. He had found it racked by civil war; he left it solidly united. Feudalism had been replaced by a nation-state on a solid foundation.

Many people believed that in Henry VIII, England would find a great king. His father had ensured that he was well educated in Renaissance learning. The Venetian ambassador Ludovico Falieri said of him, "Grand stature, suited to his exalted position, showing the superiority of mind and character . . . . He has been a student from his childhood; he knows literature, philosophy, and theology; speaks and writes Spanish, French, and Italian, besides Latin and English."<sup>19</sup>

One person whose assessment of Henry VIII was less positive was Lady Margaret Beaufort. With her son's death, she had lost her best friend. Her grandson, she found quite distant from her, and very different in character from his father.

Unfortunately, Henry VIII proved to be a pawn of Venetian manipulation. Unlike his father, he became involved in continental wars which were completely destructive to England's interest. He failed to continue the English exploration of the New World, begun by John Cabot under the patronage of Henry VII. Many of Henry VII's economic initiatives were abandoned. Ultimately, Henry VIII became a pawn in the Venetian-manipulated wars of religion.

Ironically, the heir to the legacy of Henry VII was not his son Henry VIII, whose reign was filled with contradictions and ended in tragedy. Rather, the man who best carried forward the efforts launched by Henry VII to establish a true nation-state, was Henry VIII's Lord

Chancellor, Thomas More, whose most famous work, *Utopia*, suggested that the position of king should be an elective office.

*Utopia* is one of the greatest works on constitutional law ever written. More was probably the individual best qualified to serve as England's "Solon of Athens," but it was not possible for him to play such a role. Instead, he sought to further the much longer-term process of creating a citizenry capable of establishing a republic.

The period from the Sixteenth century through to the Treaty of Westphalia which ended the Thirty Years' War in 1648, was a relative dark age in Europe, dominated by the attempt of the Venetian oligarchy to destroy the newly emerging nation-states by pitting them against each other in wars of religion. Henry VIII was a willing pawn in these schemes. Almost from the beginning of his reign, he abandoned his father Henry VII's policy of peace and economic cooperation. Under the direction of Cardinal Thomas Wolsey, Henry VIII imagined himself as a master manipulator, who ordered the relations of Europe, and played off one continental nation against another. Cardinal Wolsey even used his position as a mediator between Francis I of France and Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, to manipulate the two states into a war. England repeatedly changed sides in alliances, and spent enormous amounts of money fighting wars that in no way served the actual national interest.

Eventually, Henry VIII was induced to break with the Church in Rome, and to align England as a participant in the religious warfare that devastated Europe from the time of Martin Luther until the Peace of Westphalia. The nominal issue was Henry VIII's desire to divorce his wife, Catherine of Aragon, who had failed to produce a male heir. However, Venetian agents at the Court, such as Francesco Zorzi, manipulated the issue, to ensure a complete split between Henry VIII and the Roman Church.

## More's Commitment to the General Welfare

On Nov. 4, 2000, Pope John Paul II issued an Apostolic Letter proclaiming St. Thomas More as "Patron of Statesmen and Politicians." John Paul II saw in Thomas More a model of how leaders must serve the common good. John Paul II described this responsibility in a public address the same day:

"Politics is the use of legitimate authority in order to attain the common good of society: a common good which, as the Second Vatican Council declares, embraces



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Sir Thomas More (left), Lord Chancellor under King Henry VIII, was proclaimed “Patron Saint of Statesmen and Politicians” by Pope John Paul II in 2000. The leading exponent of Erasmus’s New Learning in England, More was famous for educating his daughters in the Classics. **Below:** “Study for a Family Portrait of Thomas More,” Hans Holbein the Younger, c. 1527.



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Io. Clemens. Hythlodæus. Tho. Morus. Pet. Aegid.

More’s “Utopia” was a Platonic treatise on statecraft, in which progress and the betterment of the populace were counterposed to perpetual feudal warfare. **Above and right:** Illustrations from “Utopia,” 1518.



The Granger Collection

‘the sum of those conditions of social life by which individuals, families and groups can achieve complete and efficacious fulfillment.’”

John Paul II says of More in his Apostolic Letter: “In this context, it is helpful to turn to the example of Saint Thomas More, who distinguished himself by his constant fidelity to legitimate authority and institutions precisely in his intention to serve not power but the supreme ideal of justice. His life teaches us that government is above all an exercise of virtue. Unwavering in this rigorous moral stance, this English statesman placed his own public activity at the service of the person, especially if that person was weak or poor; he dealt with social controversies with a superb sense of fairness; he was vigorously committed to favoring and defending the family; he supported the all-round education of the young. His profound detachment from honors and wealth, his serene and joyful humility, his balanced knowledge of human nature and of the vanity of success, his certainty of judgement rooted in faith: these all gave him that confident inner strength that sustained him in adversity and in the face of death. His sanctity shone forth in his martyrdom, but it had been prepared by an entire life of work devoted to

God and neighbor.”

In *Utopia*, More developed the idea that government must promote the General Welfare of all of its citizens. To achieve this goal would require that all the nation’s citizens be schooled to become Platonic “philosopher kings.” As More states, “For it is impossible that all should be well, unless all men are good.”

More wrote *Utopia* in the form of a dialogue between himself and a fictional character, named Raphael, who has sailed, both geographically and intellectually, “as Ulysses and Plato.” More says that Raphael has studied philosophy, “learning Greek, since the Romans left us nothing that is valuable except Seneca and Cicero.” Raphael describes to More the imaginary land of Utopia, which has achieved a far higher level of civilization than that of Europe at the time.

In a satire on the current practices of government, Raphael argues that a counsellor who advised a king to see himself as the guardian of his people, would be rejected by the king in favor of other advisers who would tell him that he should follow only his own interest. Raphael says, “I would urge the king to tend his ancestral kingdom and improve it as much as he could. He should love his people

and be loved by them.” The king’s other counsellors would reject this, however, and give the king contrary advice:

“Thus the counsellors agree with the maxims of Crassus: a king can never have enough money, since he has to maintain his army; a king can do nothing unjustly even if he wants to; all property belongs to the king, even the very persons of his subjects; no man has any other property than what the king out of his goodness thinks fit to leave him; the king should leave him as little as possible, as if it were to his advantage that his people should have neither riches nor liberty.”

Raphael then asks: Suppose I were to advise the king and his counsellors that, “both his honor and his safety consisted more in his people’s wealth than in his own. Suppose I should maintain that men choose a king not for his sake, but for theirs, that by his care and efforts they may live comfortably and safely. . . . If I should press these views on men strongly inclined to the contrary, how deaf they would be to it all!”

In discussing foreign policy, More ridicules the practice of almost all European rulers of the time, of treating relations among states as a war “of each against all,” in the phrase coined by its later enthusiast Thomas Hobbes. The Utopians’ approach, More explains, is superior: They seek alliances based on common interest, and fight wars only when they have a just reason, seeking to win them with as little bloodshed as possible.

More, by describing a dialogue at the dinner table of his former patron John Morton, discusses the foundation of justice in a society which is run on the basis of the General Welfare. More argues that the moral uplifting of the population, is the foundation for any effort to control crime, and that the harsh punishments of the time did not deter crime.

More draws a picture of a Utopian government, as a republic in which most government positions were to be elected; the prince, for example, was to be elected for life. For such a government to function, however, would require leaders who were committed to the common good, as well as a population capable of electing such leaders and advising them in carrying out the functions of government. More tells Raphael: “Your Plato thinks that commonwealths will only become happy when either philosophers become kings, or kings become philosophers. No wonder we are so far from happiness, when philosophers do not deign to assist kings with their counsels.”

An advanced system of universal education is presented. Commenting on the parasitical nature of the European aristocracy, More remarks that in Utopia, since the entire population works, and there is no aristocratic class that consumes without producing, everyone in Utopia has leisure time for study. Among the subjects empha-

sized are music, geometry, and astronomy, with the same approach to these subjects as that of the Greeks. In a biting attack on the scholastics. More says of the Utopians, “they equal the ancients in almost everything, but they are far behind our modern logicians. For they have not yet invented the subtle distinctions and hypotheses which have been so cleverly worked out in our trifling schools of logic and taught to the boys here.”

More saw this idea of the General Welfare as completely coherent with the teachings of Christ. In *Utopia*, he argues that Christianity is coherent with reason. Later on, in debates over the views of Martin Luther, More rejected Luther’s doctrine that denied free will and the importance of doing God’s work, as leading mankind to an immoral life. More, in disputing Luther’s doctrine stated, “But they fight against faith and deny Christ, who, while they extol only grace and faith, deny the value of works, and make men callous to living well.”

As John Paul II referenced, More did not see a life dedicated to virtue and the service of the General Welfare, as a life of grim, humorless determination. More says of the Utopians, “They disagree with the grim and gloom eulogist of virtue, who hates pleasure and exhort us to toils and vigils and squalid self-denial, and at the same time commands us to relieve the poverty and lighten the burdens of others in accordance with our humanity. So they conclude that nature herself prescribes a life of joy (that is, of pleasure) as the goal of life. That is what they mean by saying that virtue is living according to nature.”

More asserts that man must fulfill his need for sustenance, and not live the life of an ascetic. But, beyond this, he shows how man can find a higher pleasure than the sensual, which is the pleasure one derives from living a life coherent with reason.

Not long after the publication of *Utopia*, More found himself permanently engaged in the royal service. At this period of his reign, Henry VIII delighted in surrounding himself with men of note and learning. Humanist scholars found a cordial welcome from him and from the Queen. John Colet was their chosen preacher; Linacre, the royal physician; Tunstall, the Master of the Rolls.

The King was determined to attach so brilliant a man as More to his Court. “He could not rest, until he had dragged More to his Court—dragged is the word,” wrote Erasmus, “for no one ever tried more strenuously to gain admission to Court, than he did to escape from it.” “He hates despotism and likes equality,” wrote Erasmus of More. “He is fond of liberty and leisure, though no one is more ready and industrious when duty requires it. He was much averse from spending his time at Court, though one could not wish to serve a kinder or

more unexacting prince.”<sup>20</sup>

Erasmus described how More used his position to protect the poor: “You would say that he had been appointed the public guardian of all those in need.” He also used his position to promote the educational reforms launched by his circle. Perhaps the greatest positive accomplishment of the reign of Henry VIII, was the expansion and transformation of the educational system. Backed by Henry VIII, More was able to protect the New Learning against attempts to stifle it. In 1518, More delivered his famous address defending with all his force the New Learning of the humanists, with special reference to the teaching of Erasmus.

More was appointed Chancellor in 1529, after the downfall of Cardinal Wolsey. By then, however, Henry VIII was completely caught in the Venetian trap. He had embarked on a course of setting himself up as the supreme religious authority in England. The Venetian grouping wanted More out of the way, and succeeded in getting him executed. More was replaced as Chancellor by Thomas Cromwell, who was completely committed to the Venetian strategy.

## Shakespeare and the Reign of Elizabeth I

It was under Henry VII’s granddaughter, Queen Elizabeth I, that the combination of the new institutions of the nation-state, and the improvements in education, brought the most dramatic results. In many ways, the reign of Elizabeth, 1558-1603, was the most dynam-

ic in English history.

Elizabeth’s government carried out policies to protect and develop England’s industries. In some industries, such as coal production, the rate of expansion even exceeded that which occurred during the Industrial Revolution of the Nineteenth century. The iron industry, which had stagnated or even declined through the reign of Henry VIII, grew four-fold over the next sixty years. The shipbuilding industry was expanded through new laws, and more rigorous enforcement of old ones. The government also protected and encouraged industries where England had previously been dependent on imports, such as paper-making, glass-making, salt production, copper mining, gunfounding, and the manufacture of gun powder.

The expansion of literacy launched by the Erasmus-More circle, continued under Elizabeth. By the end of her reign, the literacy level in England had reached around 33 percent, one of the highest rates in the world at that time. And the English language reached its highest level of development during this era, as exemplified by the works of Shakespeare and the King James version of the Bible.

Although records about William Shakespeare’s youth are very limited, enough is known to show that he was a product of the cultural revolution that had been launched a half-century earlier by the circle of Erasmus and Thomas More.

Shakespeare was born in April of 1564. He probably

## Shakespeare’s Histories: The Lawlessness of Feudal Rule

In his history plays of England’s Plantagenet dynasty, Shakespeare poses the question of the king’s responsibilities and personal qualities of leadership, against the backdrop of a feudal society whose government is necessarily unlawful and illegitimate, because it rejects the principle of the common good as the basis for statecraft.

- The earliest king whom Shakespeare wrote about was King John, who reigned from 1199 to 1216. Shakespeare portrays the King as governing not by law, but his own ability to assert his own power. King John repeatedly acts arbitrarily and violently, while justifying his behavior with speeches about how his legitimacy is derived directly from God. John’s ugly behavior so outraged the people, that he brought on his own downfall.

- In *Richard II*, Shakespeare shows how a nation governed by feudal codes, quickly degenerates into rule by the strongest. Richard II (r. 1377-1399) violates the

time-honored arrangements between king and feudal lords, seizing lands to finance his wars of foreign conquest, and justifying his actions by claiming the divine right of kings. His cousin, Bolingbroke, rallies the country to reject Richard II’s violations of the feudal order, and in the end crowns himself King Henry IV. An unjust king has been replaced by one whose claim to the throne is illegitimate.

- The lack of legitimacy runs like a curse throughout Shakespeare’s histories of Henry IV, Henry V, Henry VI, and Richard III. *Henry IV* revolves around the attempts of a faction of the nobility, centered around the Percy family, to overthrow Henry. The revolt fails, because the opposing lords fall out among themselves over plans to divide the kingdom into three. This scheme proves their claim to the English throne to be even more illegitimate than that of Henry himself.

entered school around age five, and moved on to grammar school at seven. Here, he would have used William Lily's *Short Introduction to Grammar*, which was the standard Latin primer of the day.

Shakespeare's play *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, contains a parody on the Lily text, with a young boy—appropriately named William—being drilled on Latin grammar:

**Parson Evans:** Nominativo, hig, hag, hog; pray you, mark: genitivo, hujus. Well, what is your accusative case?

**William:** Accusativo, hinc.

**Parson Evans:** I pray you, have your remembrance, child. Accusativo, hung, hang, hog.

**Mistress Quickly:** 'Hang-hog' is Latin for bacon, I warrant you.

**Parson Evans:** Leave your prabbles, 'oman.—What is the focative case, William?

**William:** O, —vocotivo, O.

**Parson Evans:** Remember, William: focative is caret.

**Mistress Quickly:** And that's a good root.

**Evans:** 'Oman, forbear.

**Mistress Page:** Peace!

**Parson Evans:** What is your genitive case plural, William?

**William:** Genitive case?

**Parson Evans:** Ay.

**William:** Genitivo: horum, harum, horum.

**Mistress Quickly:** Vengeance of Jenny's case! fie on her! never name her, child, if she be a whore.<sup>21</sup>

In grammar school, Shakespeare would have been taught Erasmus's *Cato*, and the works of Terence and

Plautus. At the age of eleven, he would have graduated to works by Cicero, such as *De Officiis* and Erasmus's *De Copia*. Shakespeare's mastery of the subjects was good enough, that he is reported to have worked as a tutor in the house of Alexander Hoghton.

Beyond Shakespeare's use of Thomas More's *History of King Richard the Third*, in writing his own *Life and Death of King Richard III*, the clearest evidence of More's direct influence on Shakespeare, and Shakespeare's greatest tribute to More, is contained in the sections that Shakespeare contributed to a play on the life of More. The play, written by Anthony Munday, was rejected by the censors, and Shakespeare re-wrote several sections, trying to make it acceptable, so it could be performed. In one scene, Shakespeare shows More, as sheriff of London, calming a riot against foreign residents on May Day of 1517. Later, Shakespeare portrays More as reflecting on his appointment as Chancellor, vowing to reject the corruption brought on by honour, high office, and wealth:

It is in heaven that I am thus and thus,  
And that which we profanely term our fortunes  
Is the provision of the power above,  
Fitted and shaped just to that strength of nature  
Which we were born withal. Good God, good God,  
That I from such an humble bench of birth  
Should step as 'twere up to my country's head  
And give the law out there; ay, in my father's life  
To take prerogative and tith of knees  
From elder kinsmen, and him bind by my place

- Henry V won a series of spectacular victories against the French during his short reign, from 1413 to 1422. Shakespeare's *Henry V* centers around the victory at Agincourt, and ends with Henry V forcing a treaty on the French King that names Henry as his heir. But Shakespeare portrays the war as, among other things, a thoroughly corrupt undertaking, motivated by a desire for plunder. The play ends with a negotiated peace and marriage, overshadowed by a warning of impending disaster.

- The premature death of Henry V left the kingdom in the hands of squabbling factions of the nobility. The three plays that Shakespeare wrote about Henry VI were his first. The collapse of England's position in France, and the disintegration of England, is shown, with the factions of the English aristocracy squabbling while the King, Henry VI, is portrayed as a virtual bystander, incapable of directing events.

- Edward IV of the House of York triumphed over King Henry VI of the House of Lancaster in 1471.

When Edward IV died in 1483, he left the government in the hands of his brother, Richard, who was named regent. Richard quickly seized power and crowned himself King Richard III, murdering his potential rivals. Richard's brutal behavior rapidly alienated the nobility and common people, who sought out Henry Tudor, then in France, as an alternative. A conspiracy was hatched in England, while Henry gathered an army around himself in France, and returned to victory at the Battle of Bosworth.

The transition from Richard III to Henry VII was not merely a change of dynasty. While in France, Henry assembled the core of his future government, including the services of a number of learned men, such as Richard Fox and John Morton, who remained his advisers for life. Henry VII was a new type of ruler, whose actions were based on a fundamentally different conception of nation-state government, as opposed to the feudal brigandage of the Plantagenets. —RT

To give the smooth and dexter way to me  
 That owe it him by nature! Sure these things,  
 Not physicked by respect, might turn our blood  
 To much corruption. But More, the more thou hast  
 Either of honour, office, wealth and calling,  
 Which might accite thee to embrace and hug them,  
 The more do thou e'en serpents' natures think them:  
 Fear their gay skins, with thought of their sharp stings,  
 And let this be thy maxim: to be great  
 Is, when the thread of hazard is once spun,  
 A bottom great wound up, greatly undone.<sup>22</sup>

Thus, Shakespeare portrays More as a model for everyone: motivated by a desire to do God's work in promoting the General Welfare, and knowing that to become fixated on his own wealth and power, would bring about his own undoing. Indeed, Shakespeare's works, which have been the most widely circulated literature in the history of the English language, played a vital role in the education of the population to become this sort of citizen.

But, the world during this period was increasingly governed by the axioms created by Venetian manipulation. Europe was increasingly split into hostile blocs, rather than governed by the community of principle sought by Henry VII, Erasmus, and More.

Beginning with decisions made in the early 1580's, the Venetian financial oligarchy moved its base of operations into The Netherlands and England. In 1600, the British East India Company was formed, which grew into one of the ugliest instruments of British colonialism. A century later, this Venetian financial oligarchy was firmly in control of England.

However, even deadlier than the oligarchy's financial

subversion, was its cultural subversion. In Europe and in England, itself, the culture was gradually subverted with the re-introduction of the ideology of Aristotle in new forms, such as philosophical empiricism.

Finally, the flawed nature of the monarchical form of government was demonstrated, when Elizabeth picked a completely unworthy successor, James of Scotland, who became James I of England. Elizabeth, who had no children, chose a successor with no commitment to the English Renaissance.

Under James I, the cultural decay accelerated. James rejected the most important aspect of the Tudor revolution, the creation of a literate, educated population. Indicative of the reactionary direction of the new regime was the rise of men like Francis Bacon, who eventually became Lord Chancellor. Bacon told King James, that the education of the working classes would cause a shortage of farmers and artisans, and fill up the kingdom with "indigent, idle and wanton people." He advised James that there were too many grammar schools.

Ultimately, there developed in England a group of republicans committed to the principles of a nation-state dedicated to the General Welfare, which Henry VII had established as the basis for the English nation. When they found England, under the Venetian-style ruling class that had captured it, to be intolerable, they followed the path that John Cabot had taken over a hundred years earlier, beyond the grip of that oligarchy, establishing, on the shores of North America, a colony that would grow into the first true nation-state republic, explicitly dedicated to the principles for which Henry VII had fought. This marked the completion of the struggles waged by Henry VII and his collaborators three centuries earlier.

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