

## THE CONFESSIONS

OF

RICHARD BISHOP AND ROBERT SEYMAN,

BEFORE THE PRIVY COUNCIL,

TOUCHING CERTAIN PROPHECIES CONNECTED WITH POPULAR COMMOTIONS  
IN NORFOLK; AND THAT OF

SIR EDWARD NEVILLE,

TOUCHING NECROMANCY AND TREASURE-TROVE;

COMMUNICATED

BY SIR FRANCIS PALGRAVE, K. H.

DEPUTY KEEPER OF HER MAJESTY'S RECORDS.

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### OF PROPHECIES.

THE mutual accusations of Richard Bishop and Robert Seyman, or rather their mutual reports of their joint conversation, afford a very lively illustration of the feelings prevailing in England during the dreary reign of Henry VIII. They also elucidate a main incident in one of the most important passages in the local annals of Norfolk and the Eastern Counties—Kett's Rebellion.

It is a remarkable fact, that, very long after the Conquest, there was a strong under-current of popular opinion adverse to the sovereign: not so much in opposition to royal authority or even its abuse, as against the occupant of the throne, merely on account of his station. It was supposed, that, gained by blood, the curse of bloodshed attached to the crown; and people dwelt with secret eagerness upon tokens, omens, and prophecies of change, trouble, and misfortune.

Tradition in some cases, poetry in others, mere fancy and fiction in more, attributed these predictions to celebrated names—Marvellous Merlin, Venerable Bede, the Hermit of Bridlington, and Thomas the Rhymer, as well as the Martyrs

of English nationality, Waltheof and Becket, and others, including even the Sybil. As time advanced, the several contending parties during the various civil wars employed these vaticinations to support their pretensions; the very application of them increased their number. They became a convenient mode of embodying political feeling, and also of exciting it. This took place particularly during the wars of the Roses; and at that period they assumed nearly a uniform aspect, pointing at wars and rebellions; not unfrequently proclaiming hostility to the privileged classes, the nobility and clergy, and designating both persons and places by strange hieroglyphical symbols: frequently taken from heraldic badges and bearings, but also in some cases from analogies, which it might baffle the acuteness of Young or Champollion, Lepsius or Grotfend, to explain. Such is the little animal which holds so conspicuous a place in the prophecy that brought poor Richard Bishop into trouble: that "there shall be a rising this year or never;" "and the King's Grace is signified by a mowle" (or, as the beast is termed in Elizabethan language, a mouldewarp) "and the mowle shall be subdued and put down."

But perhaps, already, the ominous mention of the mole, or moldewarp, may have excited a familiar recollection. It occurs indeed amongst those fond predictions which excited Hotspur to anger, and Glendower to rebellion.

"I cannot choose: sometimes he angers me,  
With telling me of the moldwarp and the ant,  
Of dreamer Merlin and his prophecies;  
And of a dragon and a finless fish,  
A clip-wing'd griffin and a moulten raven,  
A couching lion and a ramping cat,  
And such a deal of skimble-skamble stuff  
As puts me from my faith."—(*Hen. IV.*)

In this, as in so many other passages, Shakspeare has imparted life to the arid chronicler. The basis of his verse is found in the following passage of Hall:

“Here I passe over to declare howe a certayne writer writeth that this Earle of Marche, the Lorde Percy and Owen Glendor wer unwisely made beleve by a Welsh prophcier, that King Henry was the Moldwarpe, *cursed of Godde’s owne mouth*, and that they thre were the Dragon, the Lion, and the Wolff, which shoulde devide this realme betwene them, by the deviacion and not devinacion of that mawmet, Merlin. I wyll not rehers howe they, by their deputies in the howse of the Archdeacon of Bangor, seduced with that falce fained prophesie, divided the realme amongst them; nor yet write howe, by a tripartie endenture sealed with their seales, all Englande, from Severne and Trent South and Eastward, was assigned to the Earl of Marche; nor how all Wales and the landes beyond Severne Westward were appointed to Owen Glendor, and all the remnaunt, from Trente Northwarde to the lorde Percie.”—(HALL’S *Chronicle*, Fol. XX.)

These prophecies were evidently only another version of the vaticinations treasured by the wizard of Bungay; for the Suffolk man will tell us more, when he declares how the subduing of the moldwarp is to be followed by the landing at Walborne or Wayborn Hope of the proudest prince in all Christendom, he who is to come to Mousehold Heath, where the three kings are to meet, and he in his turn to be subdued. Now, merely noticing that the White Lion, called in other prophecies the Lion of the North, seems in subsequent times to have been identified with Gustavus Adolphus, it will be observed that though both Bishop and Seyman evidently wished to give a true report of their conference, the one to confess the whole, and the other not to exaggerate the discourse, still they were probably too much frightened, when examined before the Council, to recollect the exact words. We must resort to another source for the fulness of the Norfolk prophecies. And they shall follow in a genuine form; though, with the usual flexibility

of tradition, after a singular minuteness as to local topography, they afterwards transfer the battle of the three kings from Mousehold to Nixon's fated forest of Delamere.

“Then shal the proudest Prince” (some books say the noblest Prince) “in all Christendome goe through *Shropham Dale* to *Lopham Ward*, where the White Lion shal meet with him, and fight a field under Ives minster, at *South Lopham*, where the Prince aforesaid shal be slaine under the minster wall, to the great griefe of the Priests all. Then there shal come out of Denmarke a Duke; and he shal bring with him the King of Denmarke and 16 great lords in his company, by whose consent he shal be crowned King in a Towne of Northumberland, and he shal raigne three months and odd days. They shal land at *Waborne Stone*: they shal be met by the Red Deare, the Heath cock, the Hound, and the Harrow: between *Waborne* and *Branksbrim*, a Forrest and a Church gate, there shal be fought so mortal a battel, that from *Branksbrim* to *Cromer Bridge*, it shal run blood: there the King of Denmarke shal be slaine, and all the perilous fishes in his company. Then the Duke shal come forth, manfully, to *Clare Hall*, where the Bare and the headlesse men shal meet him and slay all his Lords, and take him prisoner, and send him to *Blanchflower*, and chase his men to the sea, where twenty thousand of them shall be drowned without dint of sword. Then shal come in the French King; and he shal land at *Waborne Hoope*, 18 miles from *Norwich*: there he shall be let in by a false Mayor; and that shal he keep for his lodging a while: then at his returne, he shal be met at a place called the *Redbanke*,—the place is 30 miles from *Westchester*,—where, at the first affray, shall be slain nine thousand Welchmen and the double number of enemies.”—(*Sundry Strange Prophecies of Merlin*. London: 1652, sig. B.)

But we must now return to the unlucky culprits, who were in sore peril. In the reign of the Tudors (Elizabeth

not excepted) the committal, arraignment, conviction, judgment, hanging, drawing, embowelling, and quartering of any state-prisoner, accused or suspected, or under suspicion of being suspected, of high treason, were only the regular terms in the series of judicial proceedings. The first term, viz. committal, produced the last, viz. quartering, by an inevitable causation; and if Richard Bishop had been placed in the gyves in Norwich castle, his head and limbs would have decorated Magdalen Gate shortly afterwards. His assigning the "signification" of the "mowle" to the "King's Grace," was far more than enough to bring, not only the caitiff expounder, but all who heard him, and all who might have heard him, or might have heard of him, within the danger of the law.

But this was not sufficient to satisfy Henry VIII. These prophecies had excited so much anxiety in his troubled mind, that he wished to suppress them altogether. If the King's name were expressed or implied, or could be supposed to be expressed or implied, the case was clear. Yet still a mere unconnected prophecy of a Cock and a Bull (a phrase which seems to have been derived from these skimble-skamble stufferies) could not be brought within the indictment without some shadow of an inuendo; and he consequently determined to put down Merlin and his feres altogether. An Act was therefore passed (33 Hen. VIII. c. 14) declaring, that if any person or persons shall print, write, *speake*, *sing*, or declare, to any other person, of the King or any other person, any such false prophecies, upon occasion of any arms, fields, beasts, fowls, or such like things, they shall be deemed guilty of felony without benefit of clergy.

Upon the accession of Edward VI. this Act, with many others creating new felonies, was repealed. But Kett's rebellion again revealed the potency of these traditions; for it is impossible to doubt but that the Bungay prediction was amongst the "vain prophecies and superstitions," whether

said or spoken or sung, which urged Kett and his followers to insurrection (see *Blomefield*, II., p. 179);\* and the policy of the legislature again shows how deeply their influence was dreaded. The Act of Henry VIII. was revived, though in a mitigated form; and another Act, against "fond and phantastical prophecies," was passed (3 & 4 Ed. VI., c. 15), subjecting the offender to the minor punishment of a year's imprisonment and ten pounds penalty for the first offence; and, for the second, imprisonment during life, and forfeiture of all the offender's real and personal property; and, temporary in the first instance, it was subsequently extended to the end of the reign, when it expired.

These prophecies, however, continued gaining in popu-

\* The following are the prophecies which are quoted by the author on the occasion, and which, he says, were rung in their ears every hour :

"The County Gnoffes, Hob, Dick, and Hick,  
With Clubbs and clowted Shoon,  
Shall fill the Vale  
Of Duffin's Dale  
With slaughtered bodies soon."

And this :

"The headless men, within the Dale,  
Shall there be slain, both great and smale."

And he adds : "Such was their preposterous stupidity, in applying these equivocating prophecies to their delusion, that, believing Duffin's Dale must make a large and soft pillow for Death to rest on, they vainly apprehended themselves the *upholsters* to make, who proved only the *stuffing* to fill the same. Fed therefore by this vain belief, they forsook that advantageous hill, that in a great measure had enabled them by its situation to do the damage they had done, and where the Earl (of Warwick's) horsemen would have been of little service. Thus, trusting in their follies for success and resolving to end the matter before famine obliged them to disperse (for the Earl had so stopped up the passages that no victuals could arrive to their camp, and the want thereof began already to pinch them), they fired all their cabins, huts, and tents, which they had built of timber and bushes upon the hills, which almost darkened the sky with smoke; and with twenty ancients and ensigns of war marched for the adjacent valley called by that name, and there presently intrenched themselves, threw a ditch across the highways, and cut off all passage, pitching their javelins and stakes in the ground before them."

larity. Their further history is foreign to the present paper. Some curious information relating to their application to the Stuarts will be found in Sir Walter Scott's "Essay upon the Prophecies of Thomas the Rhymer." In the time of the Commonwealth they were employed against the Royal cause with great effect by the well-known Lilly, giving rise in their turn to the annual hieroglyphic of the perennial annual of Francis Moore. Lilly, as we are told by Ashmole, derived his predictions from "an old parchment book," repeated, as it should seem, in his wood-cuts (*Monarchy or No Monarchy in England*, Lond. 1651), facsimiles of two of which are here given; and we have the satisfaction of at least beholding



the true effigies of the Mouldewarp, the Dragon, and the Lion. And, disclaiming, as I have done, any responsibility of interpretation, I may yet venture to suggest that the first of the groups is emblematic of the sinister and *underground* proceedings by which Henry of Lancaster worked his way to the crown, though then applied by Lilly's inferences to the unfortunate Charles :—or, shall we say, to his advisers ?

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*The Confession of Richard Bysshop, of Bungay.*

Memorandum, that the said Richard Byshop saith that he met with one Robert Seyman at Tyndale Wood, the 11th day of May, about nine of the clock, in the 29th year of the reign of our Sovereign Lord, King Henry the Eighth; and, after such salutation as they had then, the said Richard Bishop said to the said Robert, "What tythings hear you? Have you any musters about you?" And the said Robert said, "No;" and asked of the said Richard if he had heard of any musters at Bungay; and he said, "No." Then the said Richard said, "This is an hard world for poor men;" and the said Robert said, "Truly, it is so." Then the said Richard said, "Ye seem to be an honest man, and such a one as a man might open his mind unto." And the said Robert said, "I am a plain man: ye may say to me what ye wolle." And then the said Richard said,—“We are so used now-a-days at Bungay as was never seen afore this; for if two or three good fellows be walking together, the constables come to them, and woll know what communication they have had, or else they shall be stocked. And, as I have heard lately at Walsingham, the people had risen, if one person had not been. And, as I hear say, some of them now be in Norwich Castle, and others be sent to London.” And, further, the said Richard said, "If two men were gathered together, one



might say to another what he would, as long as the third man was not there; and if three men were together, if two of them were absent, the third might say what he would in surety enough." And he said he knew where was a certain prophecy, which, if the said Robert would come to Bungay, he should hear it read. And that one man had taken pains to watch in the night, to write the copy of the same. And, if so be as the prophecy saith, there shall be a rising of the people, this year or never. And that the prophecy saith the King's Grace was signified by a mowle, and that the mowle should be subduyt and put down. And that the said Richard did hear, that the Earl of Derby was up with many; and that he should be proclaimed traitor in those parts where he dwelleth. And also he heard, as he saith, that a great company was fled out of the land. And that the Duke of Norfolk's Grace was in the North parts, and was so to be set about, as he heard say, that he might not come away when he would. "I pray God that it be not so." Also he said, that the prophecy saith that three Kings shall meet on Moshold heath, and the proudest Prince in Christendom be their subject. And that the White Lion should stay all that business at length, and should obtain. And said, "Farewell, my friend, and know me another day if ye can. And God send us a quiet world."

*(Indorsed by a different hand)—*

The confession of Richard  
bishop de Bungey.

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*The Confessione of Robert Seyman accusing Ric. Bysshopp.  
Sworne and examyned.*

M<sup>d</sup>. that the xj<sup>th</sup> day of May anno rr. Henr. viij. xxix<sup>o</sup>.,  
the said Robert Seyman of Wuttone went to a wood callid

Tyndall Wood, and about ix of the klok he whoppid for a neyghborgh of his, and there came unto hym by chaunce a man namyd Richard Biss hopp and said to hyme, "Gude morow." And the said Robert said in lyke wyse to hyme. And thene he asked the saide Robart if he se not of oone Turner. And Robert said, "No." And Richard said, "This ys an hote day." And I, Robert, said, "It is so." And then the said Richard said, "What muster they with you?" And I the said Robart said, "Nay." And then he requyred what was my name, and I shewid hyme. And then I asked hym, "Do they muster about you?" And the said Ric. said, "Nay," and said, "We are used under suche fassyone now a dais as it hath not bene sene; for if iij or iiij<sup>or</sup> of us be commynge to githers, the cunstable wold examyne what communcacione, and stokke us yf we wold not tell theyme. Gudd fellowes wold not be so used longe, if one wold be true to another." And then he said, "My thynketh ye seame to be ane honest mane, such a one as a man may trust to open his mynd vnto. And if that ij men have communcacion together, a man may go back with his word as long as no thyrd mane ys there: iij may kepe counsell if ij be away." And further the said Richard said that, "If two or three hundred men wold rysse, and one to be assuryd of another, they shuld have company inoughe to subdue the gentillmen, but there ys no companye gatheryd but there ys one fals knave amonges them; for they warr apoynted to have rysynge at Walsingham, but there was one falsse knave that discoveryd them." And Richard said, "If ye wille mete with me at Bungay, ye shuld se a prophyse and here yt redd." And than I, the said Robert, asked of the said Richarde if he war boke-lernyd. And he said, "Naye," but he wold bryng me where I shuld here yt redd in the said prophysse. He said, "Our Kynge ys singnyfyed to be a mowle, and the mowle shuld be subduyde and put downe. And that there shuld lande at Walborne Hope, the prowdest

prynce in alle Cristendome. And so shall come to Moshold heethe, and there shuld mete with other ij kinges, and shall fyghte and shalbe put downe. And the whyte lyone shuld optayne." And he saithe, that "A lord ys, as he harde say, out of the land with ane nombre of mene, and they warke where they be." Also that he hard, that "the Erle of Darby is up with a great nombre of men, and ys proclaymed traytour in the parties where he dwellithe." And more over he saithe, that "My Lord of Nourffolk's grace ys in the northe, and ys so set abowt that he cannot come awaye whane he wold as he hard. And also M<sup>r</sup> Bayly of Bungay and M<sup>r</sup> Whyt is lefte at home for none other cause but to kepe downe pore people for rysinge." And thane I said, "God spede you welle; for I wyll not medyll with you." And the said Richard said, "Fare welle, my frynde, and knowe me another day yf ye can."

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OF NECROMANCY AND TREASURE-TROVE.

THE name of the party who addresses the Lords of the Council in the accompanying Confession does not appear on the face of the document; but from the papers amongst which it was found and other collateral circumstances, there is little doubt but that he is the Sir Edward Neville, who, in the 30th Henry VIII. was arraigned for high treason as an accomplice of Cardinal Pole.

The treasonable words laid to his charge, were, "The King is a beast, and worse than a beast;" and, "I trust knaves shall be put down, and lords reign one day, and that the world will amend one day." He was of course found guilty, hanged, drawn, embowelled, and quartered.

The Pole party were very strong in Norfolk; and I suspect that our culprit was connected with Sir William Stapleton,

the monk, who has already appeared \* as a necromancer. At all events, his confession shows again how much Wolsey was supposed to be conversant with magic; and indeed the "ring" by which the Cardinal was thought to have won the fatal favour of the King, was noticed in the accusations against him when he fell. In seeking for treasure, Sir Edward fully acknowledges being led to it by "foolish fellows of the country."

In Sir Edward's account of his own dealings with Spirits and Magic, there is that curious mixture of half-doubting marvel and self-deceit, probably not unconnected with influences baffling the human intellect, so apparent in the kindred delusions of mesmerism, that strange development of the age of civilization, in no respect differing from the superstitions usually considered as the peculiar characteristics of the middle ages. He was also a practitioner in alchemy. He would jeopard his life to make the philosopher's stone, if the King pleased, aye, and was willing to be kept in prison till he had: in a year he would make silver; and in a year and a half, gold, which would be better to the King than a thousand men. But Henry was too shrewd thus to be allured into mercy; and Neville perished in the prolonged agonies which his sentence involved. He appears from other documents to have been of a light-hearted and merry temper; not very wise, but wholly innocent of any crime, except a few idle words.

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\* *Supra*, p. 57. I take this opportunity of correcting my mistake in supposing that the Confession is addressed to Cromwell. Although the Lord Cardinal be spoken of in the third person, yet it must have been presented to Wolsey.

*The Confession of Sir Edward Neville.*

Honorable Lords, I take God to record that I did never commit nor reconcile treason sith I was born, nor imagined the destruction of no man or woman, as God shall save my soul: he knows my heart; for it is he that is "*scrutator cordium*," and in him is all trust. I will not danger my soul for fear of worldly punishment: the joy of heaven is eternal, and incomparable to the joy of this wretched world: therefore, good Lords, do by me as God shall put in your minds; for another day ye shall suffer the judgment of God, when ye cannot start from it, no more than I can start from yours at this time. Now, to certify you all that I can—William Neville did send for me to Oxford, that I should come and speak with him at "Weke;" and to him I went: it was the first time that ever I saw him: I would I had been buried that day. When I came, he took me to a litell room, and went to his garden, and there demanded of me many questions, and, among all others, asked (if it) were not possible to have a ring made that should bring a man in favour with his Prince; seeing my Lord Cardinal had such a ring, that whatsumever he asked of the King's Grace, that he had; and Master Cromwell, when he and I were servants in my Lord Cardinal's house, did haunt to the company of one that was seen in your faculty; and shortly after no man so great with my Lord Cardinal as Master Cromwell was; and I have spoke with all them that has any name in this realm; and all they shewed me that I should be great with my Prince; and this is the cause that I did send for you, to know whether your saying be greable to theirs, or no. And I, at the hearty desire of him, shewed him that I had read many books, and specially the works of Solomon, and how his ring should be made, and of what metal; and what virtues they had after the canon of Solomon. And then he desired me

instantly to take the pains to make him one of them; and I told him that I could make them, but I made never none of them, nor I can not tell that they have such virtues or no, but by hearing say. Also he asked what other works had I read. And I told him that I had read the magical works of Hermes, which many men doth prize. And thus departed at that time. And, one fortnight after, William Neville came to Oxford, and said that he had one Wayd at home, at his house, that did shew him more than I did shew him; for the said Wayd did shew him that he should be a great Lord nigh to the partes that he dwelt in. And in that Lordship should be a fair castle; and he could not imagine what it should be, except it were the Castle of Warwick. And I answered and said to him that I dreemed that an angel took him and me by the hands, and led us to a high tower, and there delivered him a shield, with sundry armes which I cannot rehearse. And this is all I ever shewed him; save, at his desire, I went thither with him; and as concerning any other man, save, at the desire of Sir Gr. Done, Knight, I made the molds that ye have, to the intent he should have had Mistress Elizabeth's gear.

If any man or woman can say and prove by me otherwise than I have writed, except that I have at the desire of some of my friends "cauled to stone,"\* for things stolen, let me die for it. And touching Master William Neville, all the country knows more of his matters than I do, save that I wrote a foolish letter or two according to his foolish desire, to make pastime to laugh at. Also concerning treasure-trove, I was oft-times desired unto it by foolish fellows of the country, but I never meddled with it at all. But to make the philosopher's stone I will jeopard my life, so to do it, if it please the King's good Grace to command me to do it, or any other nobleman under the King's good Grace: and, of

\* Called spirits to the chrystal.

surety to do it, to be kept in prison till I have done it. And I desire no longer space but twelve months upon silver, and twelve and a half upon gold, which is better to the King's good Grace than a thousand men; for it is better able to maintain a thousand men for ever more, putting the King's good Grace nor the realm to no cost nor charge. Also concerning our Sovereign Lord the King's going over, this I said, "If I had been worthy to be his Grace's council, I would counsel his Grace not to have gone over at that time of year."

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