

WILLIAM CATESBY, COUNSELLOR TO RICHARD III

By J. S. ROSKELL, M.A., D.Phil.

PROFESSOR OF MEDIEVAL HISTORY IN THE UNIVERSITY OF NOTTINGHAM

THE writer's interest in William Catesby arose in the first place mainly on account of Catesby's election as Speaker for the Commons in the short parliament of January-February 1484,¹ the only parliament held by Richard III during his brief reign of little more than two years. It had been the case that in more than half of the forty parliaments which had met since the accession of Henry V in 1413 the Speaker was a trained lawyer who more likely than not filled an administrative or legal office in the royal civil service in one or other of its branches. Some Speakers of this type had been caught up in high-level politics during the struggle for power which had led to the displacement of the Lancastrian by the Yorkist dynasty in 1461. Catesby belonged to this kind of professional administrative expert who, in a determined and even ruthless pursuit of private interest and self-aggrandisement, was prepared to run the risks of involvement in political intrigue. But it was only in the sharp hectic crisis of 1483, in which Richard, Duke of Gloucester, converted his Protectorship for the minority of his twelve-years-old nephew, Edward V, into an usurpation of the throne itself, that Catesby came into prominence as one of the assistant-engineers of this palace revolution.

Catesby was a member of a family whose social status was not particularly outstanding. As gentry they were well found. But as the son and heir of a former retainer in the Household of Henry VI whose real sympathies had remained Lancastrian, his way in politics was very much his own to make. An apprentice-at-law, before the end of Edward IV's reign he was acting as legal counsel to those who controlled that peculiar complex of royal estates, the Duchy of Lancaster, and also putting his talents as an estate-agent at the disposal of a number

¹ *Rot[uli] Parl[iamentorum]* vi. 238.

of aristocratic families which had property in the area of his own family's possessions in Warwickshire, Northamptonshire, and thereabouts. Members of these peerage families who used Catesby's managerial services included some of his wife's family—the Zouches of Harringworth—and influential relatives of theirs like Lord Scrope of Bolton. They also included a new Yorkist peer, William Lord Hastings of Kirby Muxloe and Ashby-de-la Zouche, Edward IV's Chamberlain and his close and steadfast personal friend, whose territorial interests and amassment of local royal offices in the central and northern midlands allowed him a remarkable domination of those areas.

Edward IV's early death in 1483 seriously endangered such internal stability as England had managed to acquire under his rule. There was need for peace, established government, and competent administration: instead, there was the prospect of minority rule under Edward V and (as if that were not in itself depressing enough) of a more fundamental breach in the solidarity of the royal family than had even been the case sixty years before, when the infant Henry of Windsor had followed Henry V. Competing for the control of the person and authority of the young king were his mother, Queen Elizabeth, and members of her formerly pro-Lancastrian family, the Wydevilles, who hitherto had had much to do with his upbringing, and Richard of Gloucester, the sole surviving brother of the late king who, in his will, had appointed him to be Protector. Neither party felt itself safe from the other. Lord Hastings was no friend of the queen or of her family and on Edward IV's death, therefore, approved of Gloucester's Protectorship. But further than this Hastings was not prepared to go. And when Gloucester, whether moved by the stern necessities of the situation or deluded by crude ambition, resolved to be king himself and sought Hastings's support, the latter refused and paid with his life the price of fidelity to Edward IV and his issue.

In his recent book, *Lord Hastings' Indentured Retainers, 1461-1483*, W. H. Dunham Jr. prefers to regard the practice of engaging retainers as "a refinement, and not a degeneration, of an earlier feudal custom", as legally founded upon contract, and as socially conditioned by an unstrained acceptance on the

part of both lord and retainer of their mutual fidelity: "the values which governed this politico-military system were", insists Mr. Dunham, "honor and integrity, good faith and the keeping of contracts" (p. 13). This hypothetically rosy view of bastard feudalism noted, it is not surprising to find in his book only the barest allusion to the part played in Hastings's betrayal by William Catesby, who appears in Mr. Dunham's narrative simply as "common friend" of Hastings and the Protector (p. 15). Now, as is made clear in Sir Thomas More's story of Richard III's usurpation—and there is no special reason why More's details about minor personages involved in its consummation should be open to suspicion—Catesby was an intimate enough member of Hastings's affinity to be one of his private council. His appointment as Chancellor of the Earldom of March during the brief reign of Edward V may be regarded, in fact, as a move on Gloucester's part to maintain Hastings's support for his Protectorship. Then, with Hastings done to death—and Catesby was privy to the exchanges, the effect of which precipitated Hastings's fall and resulted in his execution—Catesby climbed over the body of his patron into possession of certain of his posts: Richard III, soon after his accession, granted him the office of Chamberlain of the Exchequer and (with Viscount Lovell, who followed Hastings as King's Chamberlain) the Constableness of the castle and the master-forestership of the forest of Rockingham, together with the Stewardship of certain Northamptonshire crown-lands, all of which offices Hastings had held. Also granted by Richard III the Chancellorship of the Exchequer and made an Esquire of the Body and a member of his Council, Catesby rose rapidly higher in the usurper's favour. Whatever contract had subsisted between Catesby and Hastings, it had clearly waited upon expediency.

Partly constructed on the basis of the adherence of such men as Catesby, and troubled by rebellion and rumours of foul deeds, Richard III's rule never inspired confidence. Catesby held by him to the end, much as a previous Speaker and "caterpillar of the commonwealth", Sir John Bussy, had done by Richard II, nearly a century before. But, as perhaps in this earlier instance, it may have been because he had committed himself too far to be

other than dependable. Certainly, Catesby's will, with its revelations of his disappointment at not escaping the effects of his fidelity to Richard III at Bosworth Field, suggests that he would have followed a policy of re-insurance *vis-à-vis* Henry Tudor, had it been open to him to adopt it. He was seemingly sanguine in temperament, a born gambler. And had it not been for the circumspection of those who finally threw in their lot with Henry at Bosworth, Catesby's speculations would doubtless have paid richer dividends than even hitherto had been the case. He had been unable to extricate himself from the consequences of his heavy investment in Richard III's stocks, which now were proved to have been far from gilt-edged, and his personal liability stood no chance, in the circumstances, of being regarded as a limited one.

By a succession of profitable marriages with local heiresses, that branch of the Catesby family to which William Catesby belonged had built up for itself in the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries a very substantial collection of manors and lands in the adjacent counties of Warwickshire and Northamptonshire.¹ The bulk of them straddled the boundary between the two shires, being contained in the wide angle to the south of the crossing of the Fosse Way and Watling Street. The manor of Ladbroke (Warwicks.) had come into the family by marriage early in the fourteenth century. Nearby Radbourne came in the next generation with the marriage of the Speaker's great-great-grandfather, who had been connected with the household of Edward III, the same William Catesby who had represented Warwickshire in seven parliaments between 1339 and 1365 and had been the royal escheator in 1340-1 in Warwickshire, Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, and Lancashire, and in 1368-70 in Warwickshire and Leicestershire.² The marriage of this William's son, John, who was knight of the shire for Warwickshire in 1372 and 1393, king's steward of Coventry in 1383, and later in Richard II's reign steward of the Earl of Warwick's courts in Northamptonshire, brought Ashby St. Legers (Northants.), a Duchy of Lancaster tenancy, into the

¹ G. Baker, *History and Antiquities of Northamptonshire*, i. 244-5.

² *Cal. Charter Rolls*, v. 447; *C[alendar of] P[atent] R[olls]*, 1485-1494, p. 209.

family collection.¹ This John Catesby's younger son but eventual heir, John Catesby of Althorpe, the Speaker's grandfather, by his marriage secured possession of the manors of Lapworth (Warwicks.),² and Braunston (Northants.)³. Between his occupation of the office of escheator for Northamptonshire and Rutland in 1423-4 and of the shrievalty of Northamptonshire in 1425-6, he sat in parliament for the latter county in the spring of 1425 and he was again knight of the shire in 1429-30. His son, the Speaker's father, Sir William Catesby of Ashby St. Legers, wedded, as his first wife, Philippa, daughter and coheir of Sir William Bishopston of Castleton (knight of the shire for Warwickshire in 1426), and this marriage eventually brought her son, the Speaker, possession of the manor of Bishopston in south-west Warwickshire.⁴

The Speaker's inheritance and his own purchases altogether comprised more than a dozen manors, roughly divided equally between Warwickshire and Northamptonshire, as well as other properties : in the former county were the manors of Ladbroke, Radbourne, Lapworth, Bishopston, Oxhill (secured in 1482),⁵ and Grandborough,⁶ estates in Gaydon, Hodnell, Hardwick Priors, Napton, Corley, and property in the town of Coventry ; in Northamptonshire, the manors of Ashby St. Legers, Long Buckby, Watford, Welton, Great Creaton, and Braunston, and lands at Yelvertoft, Silsworth (in Haddon), Snorscombe, Everdon, and Hellidon.⁷ Over in Leicestershire he held the manor of Kirby Bellars and property at Husband's Bosworth and Dunton Bassett ; in Huntingdonshire, the manor of Tilbrook ; and, far away in Norfolk, the manor of Redenhall.⁸ The Speaker's close connection with Richard III enabled him to

¹ *Feudal Aids*, iv. 35 ; *Cal. Charter Rolls*, loc. cit.

² Sir William Dugdale, *The Antiquities of Warwickshire*, p. 585a ; *VCH, Warwickshire*, v. 111.

³ *C.P.R., 1485-1494*, p. 96.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 209 ; Dugdale, *op. cit.* p. 526b.

⁵ *C.P.R., 1485-1494*, p. 275 ; *Cat. of Ancient Deeds*, iii. A 4575.

⁶ *Ancient Deeds*, iv. A 10387.

⁷ *C.P.R., 1485-1494*, pp. 209, 275, 340.

⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 275 ; 100 ; 129 ; *Ancient Deeds*, iv. A 8481 ; *VCH, Bedfordshire*, iii. 173 ; F. Blomefield, *An Essay Towards a Topographical History of the County of Norfolk*, v. 368.

secure great advantage from the forfeiture of estates which followed the rebellion of Henry Stafford, Duke of Buckingham, in the autumn of 1483, including some of the escheats of the duke himself and of the Marquis of Dorset. In Surrey Catesby got the duke's lordships of Camberwell and Peckham, but he mainly had his pick of places in his own region where he took the opportunity to strengthen his hold. In Warwickshire, he secured in tail-male the manors of Wootton Wawen, Little Halford, Great and Little Welford, and Ascott; in Northamptonshire, the manors of Brington, Crick, Lilbourne, Claycoton, Rothwell, and Glapthorn, and, over in south Leicestershire, the manor of Broughton Astley. When this transfer was complete, he had an interest in some two score places in this region of the central Midlands. What was the annual value of all Catesby's estates is not known, but those he received from the forfeitures of the rebels of 1483 were alone worth £273 11s. 8d., from which he paid to the king no more than £20 12s. 9d. a year.¹

The family had come some way towards a position of more than merely local influence under the Speaker's father, Sir William Catesby. When his first wife, Philippa Bishopston (the Speaker's mother), died in 1446, he was a member of the household of Henry VI merely as an Esquire of the King's Hall and Chamber.² By May 1453, however, he was an Esquire of the Body to Henry VI and was probably soon afterwards knighted.³ He had already been sheriff of Northamptonshire in 1442-3 and 1451-2, knight of the shire first for Northamptonshire and then for Warwickshire in the two parliaments of 1449, and he sat again for Northamptonshire in the parliament of 1453-4. He was once more sheriff of Northamptonshire in 1455-6. In February 1458 he was made constable of Northampton castle for life, and at the end of this year, as one of the King's carvers, he was granted an annuity of £40. Half of this sum was to be charged on the issues of Herefordshire where, at this time (November 1458-9), he was occupying the shrievalty.

¹ British Museum, Harleian MS. 433, fol. 286v.

² Exchequer, P.R.O., E. 101/409-10.

³ J. C. Wedgwood, *History of Parliament, Biographies*, pp. 163-4.

His rising fortune had already been signalled (and doubtless assisted) by his second marriage :¹ with Joan, daughter of Sir Thomas Barre and widow of a Herefordshire knight, Sir Kynard de la Bere of Kynnersley. She was very well connected, being on her mother's side a niece of John Talbot, first Earl of Shrewbury, who had appointed the Speaker's father as one of his executors just before he went to fight for what little was left to the English in Aquitaine (where, in July 1453, he was killed).² In the last two years of Henry VI's reign, 1459-61, Sir William was a firm supporter of the Lancastrian party against the Yorkists : he was one of a committee of loyalists to whom some of the estates forfeited by the Duke of York—a large group of forty-five manors—were granted (to administer) at Coventry in December 1459 ; on 15 March 1460 he was given for life the stewardship of all York's sequestered estates in Northamptonshire, Buckinghamshire, and Herefordshire, together with the constableness of the old Mortimer stronghold of Wigmore ; and only a few days later he was granted the custody of the attainted Earl of Warwick's lordship of Fownhope (Herefords.), upon which, moreover, his annuity of £40 as King's carver was now charged.³ It is very likely that Sir William fought with the Lancastrian forces defeated at Northampton in July 1460, and almost certain that he did so in the disaster which befell them at the battle of Towton Field in March 1461, for on 14 May 1461 his estates in Northamptonshire and Rutland were ordered by Edward IV to be seized, and it was not until the following December that he was able to make fine and secure a royal pardon.⁴ There was a rumour current in the following year that he was with the Lancastrian exiles in Scotland,⁵ but in view of his pardon this is most unlikely. Certainly, Sir William

¹ Baker, *loc. cit.* (Wedgwood [*loc. cit.*] is in error in making Sir William Catesby's marriage with Joan Barre his first one, and his marriage with Philippa Bishopston his second. Philippa died on 20 December 1446, Joan on 11 August 1471.)

² Lambeth Palace Library, Kemp Register, fol. 311b.

³ *C.P.R., 1452-1461*, pp. 542, 550 ; 581(461).

⁴ *Ibid. 1461-1467*, pp. 35, 120.

⁵ *Three Fifteenth Century Chronicles*, ed. J. Gairdner (Camden Society, 1880), p. 158.

was put back on the commissions of the peace in both Northamptonshire and Warwickshire in 1465. In spite of this, he clearly supported the Lancastrian restoration in 1470, being once again made sheriff of Northamptonshire by the "Readeption" government in November 1470, an office in which he was superseded by Lord Hastings's younger brother as soon as Edward IV re-established himself in April 1471. Sir William was not re-included in the Northamptonshire commission of the peace until November 1475, an appointment which he may have owed to the influence of George, Duke of Clarence, for whom he acted as a feoffee.¹ It was, however, after Clarence's execution (in November 1478) that he was made sheriff of Northamptonshire once more. He was still holding this office when he died.²

It is not very likely that the later Speaker, then a rising young apprentice-at-law, had hitherto found his father's antecedents and connections to be of much advantage to his own career. Nothing of William Catesby esquire is known until after the Yorkist restoration of 1471, apart from the fact that on 20 March 1460, shortly before the Lancastrian *débâcle*, his father and he secured a royal licence to establish a family chantry in the church of Ashby St. Legers.³ Very probably by this time the younger William was already married to Margaret, daughter of William, the sixth Lord Zouche of Harringworth who died in January 1468. The marriage had certainly taken place by December 1471 when young Catesby's wife's mother (Elizabeth) and her second husband, John Lord Scrope of Bolton, granted him for her lifetime all their lands in Houghton-on-the-Hill (Leics.).⁴ The Zouches were themselves of the parliamentary peerage and in the top flight of the landowning society of the East Midlands. Lord Scrope of Bolton, Catesby's wife's stepfather, was a prominent northern Yorkist whose adherence to the Earl of Warwick during the Lancastrian Re-adeption Edward IV thought it prudent to overlook, especially perhaps as Scrope's

¹ *C.P.R.*, 1467-1477, pp. 530, 597.

² *P.R.O.*, *Lists and Indexes*, no. IX (*List of Sheriffs*), p. 93.

³ *Ibid.* 1452-1461, p. 551. The Speaker's father simultaneously secured a licence to impark 300 acres of land at Ashby St. Legers and 1,000 acres at Lapworth (Warwicks.).

⁴ *Ancient Deeds*, iv. A 6808.

wife, Catesby's mother-in-law, was a friend of the queen. (Lady Scrope was with the queen in the Westminster sanctuary when her first son, Edward, was born during his father's exile, and had stood godmother to the child at its rather unceremonious christening.) Had Catesby later on not so hopelessly compromised himself as a supporter of Richard III, his marriage might conceivably have proved of great assistance to him in other directions: Catesby's wife's mother was half-sister to Lady Margaret Beaufort, mother of Henry VII; Catesby's wife and Richard III's supplanter were cousins.¹

Little of immediate moment seems to have come the younger Catesby's way in the 1470s. In fact, surprisingly little information about him of any sort is forthcoming until the last two or three years of Edward IV's reign. It was not until 18 May 1473 that he was put on his first commission by royal appointment: an inquiry into the estates of the late Ralph Lord Sudeley in Warwickshire.² On 5 July following, he and his wife, his father, his two younger brothers, and others of their kinsfolk were admitted to the confraternity of the priory of Christchurch, Canterbury.³ On 5 October 1474 he sold to Sir William Stock (for £42) all the wood and underwood (except crab trees) in a coppice in Grettonwood in the forest of Rockingham, for three years.⁴ Here he was very likely acting for the man who was certainly later on his master: William Lord Hastings, the King's Chamberlain, who since 1461 had shared with his younger brother the master-forestership of the royal forest of Rockingham. In June 1475 Catesby and his father were acting as feoffees-to-uses to Richard, son and heir of the Richard Knightley of Fawsley (Northants.) who had been a teller of the Exchequer between

¹ *The Complete Peerage*, ed. G. H. White, xi. 545; Dugdale, *The Baronage of England*, i. 692; *VCH, Beds.* iii. 41. Catesby's wife's mother, Elizabeth, was daughter of Sir Oliver St. John by Margaret, daughter and eventual heir of Sir John de Beauchamp of Bletsoe (Beds.), which Margaret after Sir Oliver's death married John Beaufort, Duke of Somerset, by whom she became mother of Lady Margaret Beaufort, whose son by Edmund Tudor became Henry VII. Margaret de Beauchamp died in 1482-3 when her heir was John St. John, her son by her first husband.

² *C.P.R., 1467-1477*, p. 403.

³ B. M., Arundel MS. 68, fol. 3b.

⁴ *Ancient Deeds*, iv. A 6499.

1422 and 1438.¹ Nearly two years later he was one of a small group, including Chief Justice Billing, Sir Richard Tunstall (a sometime Lancastrian diehard), Catesby's uncle, John Catesby, a royal serjeant-at-law, Robert Whittlebury, his brother-in-law, and Oliver Sutton, who were granted by a royal patent of 1 March 1477 the custody of the castles and lands of John Stafford, late Earl of Wiltshire, and his countess (Constance, daughter of Sir Henry Green of Drayton, Northants), during the minority of Edward, their son and heir.² The latter, who on the death of his father nearly four years before was aged only three years, was a first cousin to Henry Stafford, Duke of Buckingham. Shortly before Richard III's accession these same associates (except that Chief Justice Husee had been substituted for his predecessor at the King's Bench) were given the heir's wardship and marriage; confirmed in it a year later, they were still enjoying the wardship in December 1484 when they had an acquittance for a payment of £1,000.³

In the 'seventies, meanwhile, Catesby was beginning to be active as an agent for some of the more considerable landowners of his own region. On 1 October 1477, for example, Elizabeth, daughter and coheir of Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, and widow of George Neville (Lord Latimer) and more recently (in 1476) of Thomas Wake esquire of Blisworth, granted for life to Catesby and his son and heir, George, rents of £10 and 10 marks respectively from the manors of Kislingbury (Northants) and Bewdley (Worcs.) for William's services on her behalf.⁴ William Catesby, as a member of her council, was still in receipt of her annuity when she made her will on 28 September 1480:⁵ she appointed him one of her executors, along with John Sapcote, Esquire for the Body to Edward IV, and William Lord Hastings, the King's Chamberlain, who was also appointed an overseer of the will together with the Duke of Gloucester and Bishop Morton of Ely; Catesby was appointed one of a small group of three of the executors who were to have the receipts of all her

¹ *C.P.R.*, 1467-1477, p. 531.

² *Ibid.* 1477-1485, p. 19.

³ *B.M.*, Harleian MS. 433., fol. 69^v, fol. 197.

⁴ *Ancient Deeds*, iv. A 7459.

⁵ N. H. Nicolas, *Testamenta Vetusta*, i. 360.

enfeoffed lands (in Northamptonshire, Buckinghamshire, Worcestershire, Gloucestershire, Devon and Somerset) and make annual account before the overseers. (His fellows in this business were John Wake, who became usher of the Chamber to Richard III, and Thomas Limerick, steward of the Latimer lands.) The Baroness Latimer died within the next few days. Two months later, the feoffees procured a royal pardon for the conveyances and a licence to enter, and at the end of December 1480 Catesby and the other operative executors began to farm (as responsible to the Exchequer) some of the Latimer estates in Worcestershire during the minority of the Baroness Latimer's grandson and heir, Sir Richard Latimer, who was then in the wardship of his mother's kinsman, Cardinal Bouchier. The Latimer feoffees were still involved in the trust in November 1483.¹ In the meantime, on 3 July 1482, Sir Thomas Vaughan (Treasurer of the King's Chamber) and John Wood (Under-Treasurer of England) had made Catesby steward of the Latimer manors of Corby and Burton Latimer (Northants.), with an annual fee of two marks and for the duration of the heir's minority.² He was already associated with Lord Hastings in other ways than as co-executor to Dame Latimer: on 1 October 1478, for instance, the two men were involved (with others) in leasing a place called "Over Court" in Farthingstone (Northants.).³

It was shortly after this that Catesby's father, Sir William, was for the last time appointed sheriff of Northamptonshire. At the previous midsummer (1478) Catesby himself had been put on a royal commission to hold an inquest post mortem regarding the lands of a Northamptonshire widow,⁴ and, more recently, on 30 July 1478, father and son had together been made commissioners of inquiry into cases of forestalling and regrating of grain and malt in Northamptonshire.⁵ Early in his father's year of office as sheriff, William Catesby esquire was also put on a commission of gaol delivery at Northampton (by patent of 8 February 1479).⁶

¹ *C.P.R.*, 1477-1485, pp. 233, 241; B.M., Harleian MS. 433, fol. 124^v.

² *Ancient Deeds*, iv. A 8428.

³ *Ibid.* A 6469.

⁴ *C.P.R.*, 1477-1485, p. 111.

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 144.

⁶ *Ibid.* p. 146.

Before his year of office as sheriff was ended, Catesby's father died. This was probably not long before 22 October 1479, when writs of *diem clausit extremum* were sent by the Chancery to the escheators in Northamptonshire and Warwickshire.¹ It can only have been shortly after this that Catesby came into possession of his own family-estates.

This accession of sources of income in land was quickly followed, as it happened, by a burgeoning of Catesby's managerial interests in a number of directions. On 12 January 1480 he was involved in a purchase of the manor belonging to the Staffords at Tilbrook (Huntingdonshire), a former De Bohun manor.² Sometime between then and the Duke of Buckingham's execution for treason in the autumn of 1483, Catesby became his steward and surveyor in the manor of Rothwell (Northants.), a property which Catesby then secured for himself along with other of the Duke's forfeitures;³ on 11 March 1481 he was already included among the Duke's feoffees in Rothwell, some Stafford family estates in Essex, and the lordship of Thornbury (Glos.).⁴ In the spring of 1484 he was still interested in Buckingham's affairs, being a member of a small group of Richard III's advisers charged with meeting the Duke's debts out of some of his escheated property.⁵ Meanwhile, on 10 January 1481, his mother-in-law and her second husband, John Lord Scrope of Bolton, appointed Catesby ("their son") to be steward and surveyor of all the lands held in Northamptonshire by Lord Scrope in right of his wife; the office was to last for the lady's lifetime and carry with it a £4 fee from the issues of the lordship of Brayfield.⁶ Some of these estates, the Zouche manors of Barby, Onley, and Gretton (Northants.), they demised to him for the same term on 16 February 1484.⁷ Within half a year of this stewardship coming his way, Catesby was also appointed by his brother-in-law, John Lord Zouche (who had just come

¹ C.P.R., 1471-1485, p. 175.

² *Ancient Deeds*, iv. A. 8481.

³ C.P.R., 1485-1494, pp. 232-3.

⁴ *Ibid.* 1477-1485, p. 257.

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 498; B.M., Harleian MS. 433, fol. 176^v.

⁶ *Ancient Deeds*, iv. A 8336.

⁷ *Ibid.* iii. A 4786.

of age) as steward and surveyor for life of all his manors and lands in Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire and Warwickshire, and as surveyor of all his estates in Northamptonshire and Leicestershire : part of Catesby's reward was a grant to him (also for life) of all Lord Zouche's lands in Yelvertoft (Northants.).¹ Already, in February 1481, he had been retained as one of the apprentices-at-law engaged as counsel by the administration of the Duchy of Lancaster, with a fee of 13s. 4d. per annum ; and Catesby was to retain this office under Richard III.²

In the last year or so of Edward IV's reign, Catesby continued to engross local administrative offices and occasionally to act simply as a fee-ed counsellor. On 8 March 1482 the Augustinian priory of Laund (Leics.) made him a grant for life of an annuity of 2 marks (26s. 8d.) for his good counsel past and to come.³ A yearly rent of £2 charged on the manor of Farndon-in-Woodford (Northants.) was granted him for life on 16 May following, for counsel given by him to Edward (Grey) Lord Lisle, the second son of Edward Lord Ferrers of Groby and brother to the queen's first husband (John Grey), who had married a grand-daughter of the first Earl of Shrewsbury and was to be created Viscount Lisle by Richard III in the first week of his reign.⁴ Only a fortnight or so later and, on 1 June 1482, Lord Hastings's younger brother, Sir Ralph Hastings of Harrowden, Knight of the Body to Edward IV, made Catesby steward of his manor of Harpole for life and also steward of the manor of Harleston during the minority of the son and heir of John Dive, Attorney-General to Edward IV's queen from 1465 to 1474 ; Catesby was to take a fee of £1 a year in each case.⁵ It was a month after this (3 July 1482) that he became steward of two of the Northamptonshire manors of Lord Latimer (then still in his nonage) at 2 marks a year. And Richard III had been reigning for little more than a year when, on 1 August 1484,

¹ *Ancient Deeds*, iv. A 9650.

² Duchy of Lancaster, Accounts Various, P.R.O., D.L. 28/5/11 ; R. Somerville, *History of the Duchy of Lancaster*, i. 454.

³ *Ancient Deeds*, iv. A 13424.

⁴ *Ibid.* A 6600.

⁵ *Ibid.* A 9178.

describing Catesby as his kinsman, John Lord Dudley appointed him steward for life of the lordship of Rugby (Warwicks.) with a fee of 10 marks a year, when the life-tenant (Lord Stanley) should die, and also made him steward for life of the manors of Aston-le-Walls and nearby Appletree (Northants.) with a yearly fee of £2.¹

It is probable that William Catesby sat as knight of the shire in Edward IV's last short parliament which came together on 20 January and was dissolved on 18 February 1483. If so, it may well have been that he represented Northamptonshire, because—although the returns of elections to this parliament for Warwickshire as well as for Northamptonshire have been lost—the sheriff of Northamptonshire at the time of the election was Catesby's brother-in-law, Robert Whittlebury, whose influence on the election was more likely than not to have assisted his chances. Incidentally, the family's prestige certainly received something of a fillip when, at the end of this 1483 parliament, the king knighted Catesby's uncle, John Catesby of Whiston (Northants.) (a Justice of the Court of Common Pleas since November 1481).² Within two months of the dissolution Edward IV died (on 9 April 1483). Eleven weeks later, on 26 June, the Protector, Richard, Duke of Gloucester, usurped the throne of his nephew, Edward V. The *interim* had been full of momentous activity for Catesby.

So far in Catesby's career there is no evidence to connect him with the royal household or administration, although his legal services presumably had been used by the Duchy of Lancaster. His father, not long deceased, had been a Lancastrian in sympathy (even as late as 1470) and after the extinction of the Lancastrian dynasty of the direct line in 1471 had had no better fortune than to be linked with the unhappy Clarence; he had, however, escaped damning or serious entanglement at all stages of his career. His son at Edward IV's death held no proper office by Crown appointment: well-connected by the marriages of his forbears and his own, he was a considerable landowner in the central Midlands, but it was as a lawyer, ready with his

¹ *Ancient Deeds*, A 8428; A 7654.

² W. C. Metcalfe, *A Book of Knights Banneret, etc.*, p. 6.

advice to local aristocratic and other families and as a professional land-agent to such like, that he was making his way. Thanks to a later Speaker's *History of Richard III* (Sir Thomas More's) we are enabled to see something of the quick steps that Catesby was enabled to make, taking him from a relative obscurity, where his political place is very likely to have been chiefly derived from his membership of Lord Hastings's personal council and of the committee of the Duke of Buckingham's feoffees, into the relative glare of his position as one of the foremost counsellors to Richard III.

Much of More's information was doubtless derived from the memory of Cardinal Morton, with whom he took service as a page some four or five years after the crowning mercy of Bosworth Field. But whatever may be thought of the outcome of this relationship, in terms of the author's partisan approach or of his tendency to dip into the "inward disposition of the mind" of his *dramatis personae*, the relation of his facts about the minor characters in his story is very credible.

The death of Edward IV "at once broke up the unity of the court" (Stubbs). The Duke of Gloucester got possession of the person of the young king, imprisoned in the north such of the queen's kinsmen (the Wydevilles) as could be seized (chief of them Earl Rivers), and got himself accepted as Protector by the royal Council, mainly through the agreement of Lord Hastings, the Chamberlain. Edward V's coronation had already been put off from 4 May to 22 June 1483. It was on this day that Richard of Gloucester's right to the crown was publicly referred to in a sermon at Paul's Cross, the "Broadcasting House of the day" (as Professor Knowles has happily termed it). Three days later he was "persuaded" to accept the crown, mainly on the grounds of his royal nephew's supposititious illegitimacy, and on 26 June he began his reign. To bring this about, Lord Hastings's removal had proved necessary.

Opposed to the Wydevilles, Hastings had supported Gloucester's Protectorship, but could not be won over to the scheme which would realize the duke's greater ambition. It was Catesby, Hastings's own retainer, who was given the chance to secure his lord's support for Gloucester's usurpation of the throne,

and who (if we may believe More's account) failed of a purpose, so that on 13 June Hastings was arrested at the Tower for treason against the Protector and immediately executed. Hastings, Lord Stanley, and other lords had deliberated measures for Edward V's coronation in the Tower where the king was, while at the Protector's house in the city another part of the Council plotted to make him king in his nephew's place. Hastings was easy on the point of the Council's division and told Stanley so and why: "for while one man is there, which is never thence, never can there be thing once minded that should sound amiss towards me but it should be in mine ears ere it were well out of their mouths". And More went on: "this meant he by Catesby, which was of his near secret counsel, and whom he very familiarly used, and in his most weighty matters put no man in so special trust, reckoning himself to no man so lief, since he well wist there was no man to him so much beholden as was this Catesby, which was a man well learned in the laws of this land, and by the special favour of the Lord Chamberlain [Hastings himself] in good authority, and much rule bore in all the county of Leicester, where the Lord Chamberlain's power chiefly lay . . . surely thought he that there could be none harm towards him in that Council intended where Catesby was". Richard of Gloucester used Catesby to try to win Hastings over to his plan. And then More's relation continues: "But Catesby, whether he essayed him or essayed him not, reported unto them that he found him so fast, and heard him speak so terrible words, that he durst no further break. And of truth, the Lord Chamberlain of very trust showed unto Catesby the mistrust that others began to have in the matter. And therefore he, fearing lest their motions might with the Lord Hastings diminish his credence, whereunto only all the matter leaned, procured the Protector hastily to rid him. And much the rather for that he trusted by his death to obtain much of the rule that the Lord Hastings bore in his country, the only desire whereof was the allective that induced him to be partner and one special contriver of all this horrible treason."¹

If all this was so, Catesby's was a double treason. And

¹ *The English Works of Sir Thomas More*, ed. W. E. Campbell (1931), p. 53.

certainly he directly profited by his former patron's death even before Richard of Gloucester took the crown. Already, however, a month before Hastings's execution, Catesby was clearly in favour with the then newly-recognized Protector, on 14 May 1483 being granted for life the office of Chancellor of the peculiarly Yorkist Earldom of March with an annual fee of £40. This was doubtless part of a move on Gloucester's part to put into his friends' hands that administrative machine which Edward IV had devised for the government of the unruly March of Wales, a plan recently under the nominal control of his son who was now the nominal king but under the actual control of a group of men among whom Edward V's maternal uncle and governor, Earl Rivers, had been pre-eminent. In this office Catesby was to be under the orders of the Duke of Buckingham.¹ And on the day after this appointment—15 May—Catesby was for the first time made a J.P. in his own county of Northamptonshire.²

Catesby's advancement opened up the way to private as well as public preferment. For twelve years a Hertfordshire lawyer, John Forster esquire, a member of Edward IV's household and a close connection of Lord Hastings, had been steward over all the manors and franchises of the great Benedictine abbey of St. Albans, and more recently Hastings had been associated with Forster in this office by a grant of it to them both for life (in survivorship). Hastings's "treason" involved Forster in immediate arrest and imprisonment in the Tower, where he remained in custody for nearly nine months; within two days of his arrest he was compelled to make over his office of steward to Catesby; and the appointment was ratified, presumably without any option in the matter, by Abbot Wallingford and his monastic chapter on 1 August following.³

Twelve days after Hastings's death, Edward V was deposed. On the same day, 25 June, Earl Rivers was put to death without proper trial at Pontefract, along with two other members of

¹ B.M., Harleian MS. 433, fols. 6, 12b.

² C.P.R., 1477-1485, p. 587.

³ *Registra Abbatum monasterii Sancti Albani*, ed. H. T. Riley (Rolls Series, 1873), ii. 113, 200, 266.

Edward's former council, Sir Thomas Vaughan (his chamberlain) and Sir Richard Hawte (a cousin of Queen Elizabeth). In charge of their execution was Sir Richard Radcliffe, a Yorkshire knight, who was hurrying south from the dales with forces to put at Gloucester's disposal, there soon to become, like Catesby, one of the usurper's right-hand men. Radcliffe and Catesby were already related: they shared Lord Scrope as father-in-law. Only two days before the butchery at Pontefract, in the Protector's own castle at Sheriff Hutton, with full knowledge of his impending fate, Rivers had drawn up his will: Catesby was among the executors recommended, Gloucester himself being written down as overseer, if he would act.¹ Hawte, whom Rivers obviously did not expect to die and appointed as another of his executors, before his own execution left the Bishops of Worcester and Durham bound (as his sureties) to Catesby in an obligation of 700 marks; and in December 1483 they were granted Hawte's land-rents to enable them to meet the charge.²

On the fifth day of Richard III's reign (30 June 1483) Catesby was by royal patent confirmed for life in his new office of Chancellor of the Earldom of March and, by separate patents of the same date, grants for life were also made to him of the Upper Exchequer office of Chancellor of the Exchequer and of the Lower Exchequer office of Chamberlain of the Receipt which his late master, Hastings, had held at his death.³ He was admitted to the Chamberlainship ten days later (on 10 July).⁴

Catesby's engrossing of local offices continued with an appetite further sharpened by his membership of Richard III's Council and by a proximity to the king's person that was even further assured by his new office in the royal Household of Esquire for the Body. He and Francis Viscount Lovell, Richard III's Grand Chamberlain, together got a grant of the constableness of Rockingham castle (Northants.), an office given by Edward IV in 1461 to Lord Hastings and his younger brother Ralph;

¹ *Excerpta Historica* (London, 1831), p. 248. (The will was never proved.)

² B.M., Harleian MS. 433, fol. 129v.

³ *C.P.R.*, 1477-1485, pp. 360-1. There were, of course, two Chamberlains of the Receipt. Catesby enjoyed the right to appoint one of the ushers of the place.

⁴ P.R.O., typescript *List of Officials*, p. 9.

and they also followed Catesby's former patron in the connected offices of master-forester of the forest of Rockingham, steward of the manors of Rockingham, Brigstock, and Cliffe, parker of Brigstock, and overseer of the herbage, pannage, and foreign wood of these manors for the term of Catesby's life.¹ Catesby was also, early in 1484, occupying the office of justice of the forest of Whittlewood, out of which he was instructed to make large grants to Lord Lovell.² He held on to this latter office, but the Rockingham offices were early in 1485 restored to Sir Ralph Hastings who had received a royal pardon since his brother's death and was now a Knight of the Body to Richard III. The act of restitution was apparently made with Catesby's agreement, for the exemplification of the patent embodying the original grant of 1461 was conceded on 20 February 1485 expressly at his request.³ Meanwhile, on 16 August 1483, Lord Lovell, Chief Butler of England as well as Lord Chamberlain, had appointed Catesby as one of his two deputy-butlers in the ports of Bristol, Exeter, and Dartmouth.⁴ And on 25 September following, Catesby, now for nearly three years one of the legal experts in the service of the duchy of Lancaster, was appointed for life as steward of the duchy lordships of Higham Ferrers and Daventry, Peverell's fee, and other duchy estates in Northamptonshire.⁵ (Catesby's step-father-in-law, Lord Scrope, was Chamberlain of the Duchy and therefore nominal head of its council.) His links with Viscount Lovell quickly multiplied: it was at the King's instance that, on 5 October 1483, the abbot of the south Yorkshire Benedictine house of Selby gave Lovell and Catesby a grant for their lives (in survivorship) of the office of steward of the manor of Stanford (Northants.), near where Catesby's own estates were thick upon the ground.⁶ Later in the year, on 17 December 1483, Lord Stanley, who more by good luck than good management had survived the usurpation-crisis of the summer and who, now that the sons of Edward IV and the

¹ B.M., Harleian MS. 433, fols. 104, 286^v.

² *Ibid.* fols. 153, 195^v.

³ *C.P.R.*, 1477-1485, p. 536.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 465.

⁵ B.M., Harleian MS. 433, fol. 29; R. Somerville, *op. cit.* i. 586.

⁶ *Ancient Deeds*, iv. A. 11064.

Duke of Buckingham had been done to death, was in an especially difficult position because his stepson, Henry of Richmond, was Richard III's only potentially serious challenger for the throne, saw fit to bestow for life on Catesby an annuity of five marks for his goodwill and counsel ; the sum was to be charged on the manor of Kimbolton (Huntingdonshire), an estate granted to Stanley out of Buckingham's forfeited property.¹

Esquire of the Body to the King and a member of his Council, holding the two Exchequer offices of Chancellor and Chamberlain and the Chancellorship of the Earldom of March, Catesby was entirely committed to stand or fall with the new régime. That there was a persistently serious possibility of its collapse is evident from the fact that within four months of Richard's accession the chief supporter of his usurpation, the Duke of Buckingham, was plotting his overthrow in concert with Lancastrian sympathizers and other hostile elements. Buckingham's rising failed, and he was executed on 2 November at Salisbury. The king, who had refused him an interview, then moved to deal with the other rebel sectors in the south-west, Catesby almost certainly in attendance. It was as an Esquire of the Body that, at Exeter, on 13 November (the day after the king's arrival there) Catesby was appointed to serve on a royal commission to arrest and imprison rebels in Oxfordshire and Berkshire. He was back at Westminster with the king on 26 November when he was present at the ceremony in which Richard gave the great seal back into the keeping of the Chancellor, Bishop Russell of Lincoln ; the king had had it with him since 19 October.² Already, since the early part of August, a justice of the peace in Leicestershire, Warwickshire, Worcestershire, and Gloucestershire³ (as well as in Northamptonshire), Catesby was also put on the commission of the peace in Oxfordshire and Berkshire on 5 December 1483 and in Hertfordshire too (here, perhaps because he was steward of the lands of the abbey of St. Albans).⁴ A few days later (on 10 December) he was made a

¹ *Ancient Deeds*, A 10182.

² *C.P.R.*, 1477-1485, p. 371 ; T. Rymer, *Foedera*, xii. 203.

³ *C.P.R.*, 1477-1485, pp. 561, 564, 576, 578.

⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 554, 562, 569.

member of royal commissions of inquiry into treasons and acts of rebellion in his own territory of Northamptonshire, Warwickshire and Leicestershire, with authority to seize the estates of delinquents.¹

Catesby's appointment to this commission followed by one day the issue of writs re-summoning Richard III's first parliament. Its earlier assembly, fixed for 6 November 1483, had been postponed on account of the Duke of Buckingham's revolt. Now parliament was called for after Christmas. Catesby was elected, but whether for Warwickshire or Northamptonshire is not known. Northamptonshire is the more likely alternative, if only because in the shrievalty of this county one brother-in-law of Catesby's, Robert Whittlebury, had just been succeeded by another, Roger Wake esquire. The parliament began, as summoned, at Westminster on 23 January 1484, and the Common's choice for their Speaker fell on Catesby, whom they presented for his royal master's formal acceptance on 26 January. This parliament was to have a short session of barely four weeks, ending on 22 February, but some of the business transacted was of great importance. One of the first matters to come up was the ratification by parliamentary authority of the proceedings by which Richard III had obtained the crown. A bill to this effect was introduced in the Lords and came down to the Commons for their approval. Then came the attainders of those who had committed treason in the late rebellion. Another act invalidated the letters patent made to Edward IV's queen, Elizabeth Wydeville. The king's need for popularity inhibited the expression of any royal desire for direct taxation, and no vote was volunteered, but the Commons under Catesby took an unprecedented step in granting to the king, in his first parliament and in the first year of his reign, tonnage and poundage and the wool subsidies for life. (Edward IV had been voted such a grant only in his second parliament and after four years of his reign had elapsed.)

Contrary to what was becoming the usual practice, Catesby does not seem to have received a money reward, charged on the Exchequer, in return for his prolocutorial services. But

¹ *C.P.R., 1477-1485*, p. 393.

he certainly did well out of grants of recently forfeited estates : property worth some £273 odd a year, in Warwickshire, Northamptonshire, Leicestershire, Surrey, and in London, fallen into the king's hand by the attainders of the Duke of Buckingham, the Marquess of Dorset, and Sir George Browne, was bestowed on him and his heirs-male, at a mere rent of £20 odd.¹ What he picked up "on the side" from his Speaker's office, there is no means of knowing. During the session, however, another fresh if small item of income came his way in the grant (on 3 February) of a yearly fee of 2 marks for life from the abbot and convent of the little Cistercian house at Combe near Coventry, with licence to enter its lands in Harbury (Warwicks.), a mile or two away from his own manor of Ladbroke, in case of non-payment.² And when the parliamentary session had still a week to run, on 16 February, his wife's step-father and her mother (Lord Scrope and his lady) granted him three Northamptonshire manors for the duration of her lifetime.³ A fortnight after the session was done, a further piece of royal bounty came to Catesby in the form of a grant of the wardship of the lands and the advowson of the church of Braunston (near Ashby St. Legers) during the minority of the son of a former usher of the Chamber to Edward IV, John Acton esquire.⁴ The seven years' occupation of Stafford lands in nine counties which Catesby, along with Chief Justice Hussey, William Beverley (Dean of the King's Chapel), and Edmund Chadderton (Treasurer of the King's Chamber and receiver and surveyor of Buckingham's forfeitures) was granted on 23 May 1484, was, of course, for the payment of the late Duke's debts.⁵ But the grant for a term of years to Catesby, referred to in a warrant dated at Pontefract a week later (on 30 May) and ordering the tenants of a number of forfeited Wiltshire manors to pay him their dues and give him obedience, was one made by the king "for the contentacion of certain dettes by us to hym appointed to be satisfied".⁶

¹ B.M., Harleian MS. 433, fols. 45^v, 286^v.

² *Ancient Deeds*, iii. A 4306.

³ *Ibid.* A 4786.

⁴ *C.P.R.*, 1477-1485, p. 419.

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 498.

⁶ B.M., Harleian MS. 433, fol. 174^v.

In this year of his Speakership, Catesby inevitably served on a number of casual royal commissions in addition to discharging the duties of his offices and more permanent commissions. The first of these occasional commissions passed the great seal on 1 March 1484: a commission to the Duke of Norfolk and others, including Catesby and his kinsman, Justice Catesby, to deliver Newgate gaol of Sir John Guildford of Rolvenden, who had led the rising of the men of Kent in the previous autumn and had suffered attainder in the recent parliament.¹ Thwarted in the autumn of 1483, Henry Tudor was still in exile. But he was supported at the Court of Brittany where at Christmas he had actually been proclaimed King of England, and there was a constant anticipation of landings on the south coast of England in the spring of 1484. On 1 May 1484 Catesby himself was made a member of commissions of array in Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Northamptonshire.² A truce with Brittany, made early in the following month, profited Richard III little if at all, for Henry Tudor moved into an even more cordial atmosphere at the court of the young Charles VIII of France. On 26 June Catesby was included in a commission authorized to take (at Southampton) the muster of a retinue of 1,000 archers which Lord Powis was supposed to be taking to Brittany, presumably as a consideration for the truce and perhaps for the seizure of the English exiles; but the force seems never to have gone overseas. On 20 February 1485 Catesby was one of those appointed to negotiate for an extension of the Anglo-Breton truce; this they secured, the existing truce from 1 July 1484 to 24 April 1485 being continued to Michaelmas 1492.³ In the meantime Richard III's efforts to gain credit by invading Scotland had come to nothing, so that, and in face of the threat of attack from across the Channel, by the end of the summer of 1484 he had to reconcile himself to an Anglo-Scottish peace, and on 11 September an embassy from James III arrived in Nottingham with full powers to negotiate. On 20 September fifteen of Richard's counsellors, headed by the Chancellor and including Catesby, were authorized

¹ *C.P.R.*, 1477-1485, p. 465.

² *Ibid.* p. 400.

³ *Ibid.* p. 547; Rymer, *Foedera*, xii. 261.

to treat with the Scottish emissaries for a peace ; only four of these English commissaries—the Chancellor, the Duke of Norfolk, Radcliffe and Catesby—made up the select group separately entrusted with the negotiation of a marriage between James III's heir and Anne, the daughter of the Duke of Suffolk and Richard III's niece.¹ Both objects were guardedly conceded by the Scots whose faith in Richard's political stock was presumably not boundless.

The king's difficulties, given the best will in the world to pacify the country and appease the many malcontents that his usurpation and the manner of it had raised up, did not diminish as time went on. Rather, they grew. The structure of his government was narrowly based. Catesby was one of the few who enjoyed his real confidence. Sometime in the second half of this year, 1484, one William Collingbourne was lampooning the triumvirate of chief counsellors in the well-known couplet :

The catte, the ratte, and Lovell our dogge
Rulyth all Englande under a hogge.

Which meant, as Fabyan was to put it, that " Catesby, Ratcliffe, and the lorde Lovell ruled the lande under the Kynge, which bare the whyte bore for his conysaunce ". This critic of the Ricardian régime, a Yorkist agent of the king's mother deprived of his job in favour of Viscount Lovell, was too dangerous to live (it was felt), and he was condemned for treason before the end of 1484.² But there was no stopping the rot. Fresh commissions of array were issued on 8 December 1484, Catesby serving on those for Northamptonshire, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Berkshire, and Hertfordshire.³ He continued to profit by his close contacts with the king. On 15 February 1485, as one of the royal Esquires of the Body, he was granted in tail-male the hundred of Guilsborough (Northants.) with fines and franchises, at a rent of 4 marks a year to the king. At his death—although for how long is not known—he also occupied

¹ *Rotuli Scotiae*, ii. 465-6.

² J. H. Ramsay, *Lancaster and York, 1399-1485*, ii. 528-9.

³ *C.P.R.*, 1477-1485, pp. 488-9, 491.

the offices of constable of the castle and parker at More End in south Northamptonshire.¹

Catesby's authority as a member of the royal Council (or his reputation for great influence with the king) was particularly exemplified shortly after the death of Richard's Queen, Anne Neville, on 16 March 1485. Following the death of their son nearly a year before, Richard had recognized his nephew, the Earl of Lincoln, as his heir-presumptive, but it appears that even before his Queen died he was worried over the need for a direct heir and perhaps contemplated a divorce. A report was even going about that the king intended to marry his niece, Elizabeth, Edward IV's eldest daughter, whom there had already been plans to marry to Henry Tudor, and within three weeks of Queen Anne's death the king himself had to deny the truth of the slander to the chief citizens of London. Clearly, as a possible plan it was in shape. If we may believe the Croyland Chronicle, those in the royal Council most opposed to this choice of a second queen were Radcliffe and Catesby, *quorum sententiis vix unquam Rex ipse ausus fuit resistere*. This source relates that they told Richard to his face that even the northerners (among whom he enjoyed love and respect) would charge him with procuring the death of his queen, a daughter and heir of Warwick the Kingmaker, in order to enter an incestuous relationship, and that he must deny any such scheme. The chronicle further alleges that Catesby and his colleague (and kinsman) were afraid of the vengeance that Elizabeth of York would take on them, should she be made queen, for the death of those members of her mother's family (her uncle, Earl Rivers, and her step-brother, Sir Richard Grey) executed nearly two years before.²

In the uneasy months that lay between Easter 1485 and the final ruin of Catesby's lord and his own, but little is known of his activities. On 6 May his uncle, Sir John Catesby, Justice of Common Pleas, appointed him one of the executors of his will, which made provision for the disposal of nearly £800 between the testator's wife, two daughters, and eight sons, and for the

¹ C.P.R., 1477-1485, p. 497; *ibid.* 1485-1494, p. 60.

² *Rerum Anglicarum Scriptorum Veterum* (Oxford, 1684), i. 572.

entailing of most of his real estate on his eldest son, Humphrey : the money to be taken to the chamber of the Guildhall in London, there to be kept *secundum consuetudinem civitatis*.¹ On 25 May, both William and Justice Catesby were appointed members of a royal commission of oyer and terminer regarding counterfeiting and other coinage offences in the midland shires and especially in Coventry.² On 10 June, Francis Viscount Lovell, the King's Chamberlain, arranged for the feoffees of five of his Northamptonshire manors, among whom were his colleagues in the King's Council, Radcliffe and Catesby, to convey these estates to his wife for life, should he have died before her, on the understanding that, if they did so, she should find two priests to celebrate mass for his soul for thirty years in the University of either Oxford or Cambridge.³

At this time Richard III was standing by at Nottingham to meet alarms as they arose. On 7 August Henry Tudor, Earl of Richmond, landed at Milford Haven in Pembrokeshire. Eight days or so later he was at Shrewsbury. Another week later still, and the forces of the two contestants for the throne faced one another at Bosworth Field. Viscount Lovell, Lord Zouche (Catesby's brother-in-law), Sir Richard Radcliffe (his wife's kinsman by marriage), and Catesby himself were with the royal army. On 22 August 1485 the issue was decided, Richard III being killed in the battle, and in the evening of the day of his victory Richmond entered Leicester in triumph. Radcliffe had been killed. Lovell escaped to sanctuary at Colchester. Zouche, too, got away. But Catesby had been taken prisoner, and he alone of men of importance in the royal army who were so captured was executed after the battle. An exception to Henry VII's otherwise remarkable clemency, he went to the block at Leicester, possibly a sacrifice to local resentments generated in this, his own, region. This was presumably three days after the battle.⁴ The Croyland Chronicle merely notices his capture

¹ Somerset House, Register Milles, fol. 1. (The will was re-made on the day after Bosworth Field).

² *C.P.R.*, 1477-1485, p. 544.

³ *Ancient Deeds*, iii. A 4790.

⁴ *The Three Books of Polydore Vergil's English History* (Camden Society, 1844, vol. 29), ed. Sir Henry Ellis, p. 224. Polydore says that Catesby was

and death without giving a date : *qui inter omnes consiliarios defuncti jam Regis preeminebat, cujus caput apud Leicestriam pro ultima remuneratione tam excellentis officii sui abscisum est.*¹ It was at any rate on 25 August that Catesby made his will.²

This last deed of Catesby is a remarkable document in many ways, its terms emotionally instinct with their author's knowledge of his coming end. His wife Margaret was to be sole executrix, his "dere and welbeloved wife to whom I have ever be trew of my body". Requesting her forgiveness for any uncourteous dealings with her, he asked her not to re-marry but for all her days "to do for my soule". Not until the last apparently had he given up the hope that some of his earlier connections might yet bring him through, especially his wife's uncle by marriage, Lord Stanley, and his family : "my lordis Stanley, Strange [Lord Stanley's son], and all that blod, help and pray for my soule, for ye have not for my body, as I trusted in you". His previous relations with Lord Lovell had clearly been on an intimately friendly basis : "and [if] my lord Lovell come to grace than [then], that ye shew to hym that he pray for me." No reproach there. But even in his own family there were those who thought of him less, in his view, than they might have done : "and Uncle John [Justice Catesby], remembre my soule as ye have done my body, and better". His reference to the new king, his wife's own kinsman, was perhaps abject, but he was thinking of his children's rights in lands that now would likely go to some of Henry's supporters, following his own attainder : "I doute not the king wilbe good and gracious lord to them [his children], for he is callid a full gracious prince, and I never offended hym by my good and free will, for, God I take to my juge, I have ever lovid hym". There was some provision made for transactions in landed estate, "truly bought", that had not been entirely completed, at Buckby and Redenhall (in Norfolk), and any wrongfully purchased property was to be

executed two days after Bosworth Field, that is, on 24 August. The inscription on the brass over Catesby and his wife's tomb at Ashby St Legers gives the date of Catesby's death as 20 August. But this antedates the battle of Bosworth by two days, and, in any case, Catesby's will is clearly dated 25 August.

¹ *Rerum Anglicarum*, op. cit. i. 575.

² Somerset House, Register Logge, fol. 15.

restored. Catesby made reference to some of his debts, including the one outstanding to his saddler. His father's debts, especially what he had given to the house of Austin canons at Catesby, were also to be discharged. There were a few individual bequests : his wife's aunt, Margaret St. John, abbess of Shaftesbury, was to receive 40 marks, and "my lady of Buckingham" (Katherine, Duchess of Buckingham and sister of Edward IV's queen) was to have £100 to help her children and to see the debts of the late duke paid and his will executed, especially regarding a grant of land in mortmain to the college of secular priests at Pleshey (Essex). The Bishops of Winchester, Worcester, and London were asked to help Catesby's wife to execute the will "and [if] they will do sume what for me".

The will was proved by Cardinal Bouchier (exercising his archiepiscopal prerogative) at Knoles on 31 January 1486, Catesby's widow acting as executrix by proxy. Henry VII's first parliament had met at Westminster on 7 November 1485, and by this time its second and final session was a week old. The Speaker was Catesby's successor also in his office of Chancellor of the Exchequer, Thomas Lovell. The first session had seen the passage of an Act of Attainder against the most important of those who had taken up arms against the present king and levied war at Bosworth Field. They included William Catesby, who was condemned for treason to forfeit his estates whether held in fee-simple, fee-tail, or for term of life or lives.¹ There was some opposition among the Commons to the Act as a whole, but Henry VII was adamant : a correspondent of Sir Robert Plumpton wrote that "ther was many gentlemen agaynst it, but it wold not be, for yt was the Kings pleasure".²

Catesby's rôle in 1483 (after Buckingham's rebellion) was now assumed by others at his own family's expense, and for the next nine years royal grants parcelled out what of his forfeitures had at first come into immediate royal control. The work of a

¹ *Rot. Parl.* vi. 276a.

² *Plumpton Correspondence* (Camden Society, 1839), ed. Thomas Stapleton, p. 48.

century-and-a-half of steady, quiet accumulation of estate, mainly by marriage alliances, was soon at least partially undone. By the time that Catesby's " anniversary " came round, Kirby Bellars, Tilbrook, Braunston, Redenhall, and Botesworth had all been the subject of royal grants in tail-male, and more grants and re-grants followed, members of the new Tudor royal household being the chief recipients.¹ It is possible that the 1,000 mark-worth of goods belonging to Catesby, which the Chancellor (Bishop Alcock of Worcester) was granted by Henry VII on 5 April 1486, was used by him to assist the administration of Catesby's estate as the latter's testament had suggested. It is possible, but doubtful. There was really little room for clemency, accepted the thesis of Henry of Richmond's dynastic rights. Catesby's widow was related by blood with the new royal family, but both her husband and brother had fought for Richard Crookback. Her husband's fellow-counsellor, Sir Richard Radcliffe, killed at Bosworth, was husband to her step-sister. And in spite of the marriage of Catesby's son and heir, George, with Elizabeth, daughter of the Sir Richard Empson of Easton Neston (Northants.) who with Henry VII's accession resumed his former office of Attorney-General for the Duchy of Lancaster and became one of the " great projectors " of this reign,² it was not until after the passage of some ten years that Catesby's attainder was reversed, in the parliament of October 1495. Even then, the petition for the heir's rehabilitation, preferred by the Commons as one of their own bills, itself contained a proviso that restitution was not to apply to such grants of Catesby property as were then in force, and that the King's Chamber should be paid £100 a year for seven years by Bishop Alcock (now of Ely), Sir Richard Empson, and John Spenser (a creditor of William Catesby), who were to occupy those Catesby estates which were still in royal custody, merely as tenants, presumably on the heir's behalf.³ William Catesby's widow, Margaret, did not live to see this " act of adnullacion

¹ *C.P.R.*, 1485-1494, pp. 78, 96, 100, 121, 129, 209, 231, 275, 340, 404; *ibid.* 1494-1509, p. 11.

² Dugdale, *Warwickshire*, *op. cit.* p. 399a.

³ *Rot. Parl.* vi. 490b; *C.P.R.*, 1494-1509, p. 40.

and restitution " in her son's favour: she had died on 8 October 1494.¹

¹ Baker, *op. cit.* i. 244-5. William Catesby's family continued to hold the estates which had been restored and materially added to them during the sixteenth century. William's grandson, Sir Richard, was twice sheriff of Warwickshire and Leicestershire (in 1540-1 and 1545-6) and twice of Northamptonshire (in 1542-3 and 1549-50), and he was knight of the shire for Warwickshire in Edwards VI's last parliament in 1553, before the dissolution of which he died. But later came setbacks culminating in disaster. Sir Richard's grandson and heir, William, was a staunch adherent of the old faith and suffered as a recusant, and *his* son Robert was so fanatical a Roman Catholic as to be involved in treason in Essex's Rebellion and again in the Gunpowder Plot, immediately after the discovery of which he was rooted out and killed. And, of course, he was attainted and incurred forfeiture. Both his two sons died without issue.