Lambert Simnel and Edward V

By Matthew Lewis

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(With thanks to Matthew Lewis)

This post turned into a way longer piece than I meant, so please bear with it!

When I wrote The Survival of the Princes in the Tower, I posited a theory, one of many alternatives offered. This particular idea has grown on me ever since, and I find myself unable to shake it off. I'm beginning to convince myself that the 1487 Lambert Simnel Affair was never an uprising in favour of Edward, Earl of Warwick, as history tells us. I think I'm certain I believe it was a revolt in support of Edward V, the elder of the Princes in the Tower. Sounds crazy? Just bear with me.

Why do we think we know that the Yorkist uprising of 1487 favoured Edward, Earl of Warwick? In reality, it is simply because that was the official story of the Tudor government. It made the attempt a joke; a rebellion in favour of a boy who was demonstrably a prisoner in the Tower, who indeed was paraded at St Paul's for the masses and (perhaps more importantly) the nobility to see. There is nothing that links it to Edward V because Henry VII could not afford there to be. Interestingly, there is virtually nothing contemporary that links it to Warwick either, at least not from outside government circles, and even within the corridors of power, there are intriguing hints that all was not as it appears.

There are two types of evidence worthy of consideration. The first is that written down which differs from the official version of events. The second important aspect of the affair is the identities and actions of those involved. Examination of the first body of works throws up some interesting discrepancies. The Heralds' Memoir offers an account of Henry VII's campaign and the Battle of Stoke Field which describes the boy taken after the battle, captured by Robert Bellingham, as being named John.

'And there was taken the lade that his rebelles called King Edwarde (whoos name was in dede John) – by a vaylent and a gentil esquire of the kings howse called Robert Bellingham.' *Heralds' Memoir, E. Cavell, Richard III and Yorkist History Trust, 2009, p117*

The role of heralds on the battlefield, although they worked for a master, was traditionally impartial, their purpose being to report on the fighting decide the victor (though it was usually obvious). This herald was an eyewitness to the king's preparations and to the battle, and he reports that the boy delivered to Henry afterwards was named John. Was this a random boy who took the fall for the plot, perhaps willingly, if doing so came with a job in the royal kitchens? One other thing to note from the herald's account, which is something that runs throughout the various descriptions of this episode, is the fact that the rebels called their leader King Edward, but no regnal number is ever given. This opens up the possibility that he was claimed to be King Edward V, not King Edward VI.

A regnal number seems to first appear in the York Books. The city received a letter that began 'By the King' but offered no regnal number. The letter, asking for assistance that was denied, was transcribed at some point into the city's records beneath a note that it had been received from the imposter claiming to be King Edward VI (*York Civic Records, Vol 6, A. Raine, pp20-1*). The question is, was this written in after the official story had taken shape? The writer of the letter offers us no clue by refraining from using a regnal number to describe himself. Is it possible that all references to a regnal number were erased from the record because of the fallout it would cause Henry? Certainly, if he claimed to be Edward V, it would be a far more problematical incident for Henry, who was married to Edward's sister Elizabeth, and whose rise to the throne had relied heavily on Yorkists who would abandon him for Edward V in a heartbeat. In the Leland-Hearne version of the Heralds' Memoir, the transcriber felt the need to change this contemporary passage to assert that the boy's name 'was indede Lambert'. It is therefore easy to see how the official story was layered over contemporary variants to mask alternative versions.

One more interesting feature unique to the Lambert Simnel Affair is the coronation the boy underwent in Dublin. We are told that they used a;

'crown they took off the head of our lady of Dam and clapt it on the boy's head. The mayor of Dublin took the boy in his arms, carried him about the city in procession with great triumph. The clergy went before, the Earl of Kildare, then Governor, then Walter, Archbishop of Dublin and Lord Chancellor; and the nobility, Council and citizens followed him as their King.'

https://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/ireland/1601-3/pp661-687

Clearly, the boy was widely accepted in Ireland, with only Waterford remaining staunchly loyal to Henry VII. Here too, we have no reference to a regnal number that might help clear up the matter of who the boy was claiming to be. The act of a coronation is unusual though. Perkin Warbeck, in all his years claiming to be Richard, Duke of York, the younger of the Princes in the Tower, never underwent such a ceremony. The critical factor here is that Edward V had already been proclaimed king, in 1483 after his father's death, but had never been crowned. A coronation was the missing piece of his kingship. Was the ceremony in Dublin meant to fill this hole, or at least plug the gap? In 1216, the young Henry III had been crowned at Gloucester Cathedral because a coronation ceremony was seen as key to firming up his position as king. London was in the hands of the French and rebel barons and was therefore unavailable for the event. He had been forced to borrow a gold circlet from his mother to use as a crown, just as Lambert's ceremony had used a similar decoration from a statue in a nearby church. The pope had later instructed that Henry should be re-crowned at Westminster by the Archbishop of Canterbury because it was more proper, so there was a precedent for this potential king to have a coronation in Dublin which could then be confirmed at Westminster if his invasion was successful. The very fact of a coronation makes much more sense if it was for Edward V, a proclaimed but uncrowned king than for Edward VI.



Lambert Simnel, carried through Dublin after his coronation

The *Heralds' Memoir* account of Robert Bellingham capturing a boy named John who would later become Lambert Simnel – or at least, the account states that this John was the boy the army followed and claimed to be their king – is neither the beginning nor the end of contemporary or near-contemporary confusion about the identity of the nominal leader of this rebellion. We know that Henry VII ordered the burning of all of the records of the Irish Parliament held in 1487, and when Sir Edward Poynings arrived in Ireland shortly after the Lambert Simnel Affair, we cannot know what else was destroyed. Paperwork that might help work out whether the boy claimed to be Edward V or Edward VI is therefore hard to come by and, as with the York Books, when it was written becomes paramount. If it was after the official story took hold, it is bound to say Edward VI. How hard can it be to make 'V' become 'VI' anyway?

The Annals of Ulster is a chronicle compiled by a contemporary to these events, Cathal Mac Manus Maguire, the Archdeacon of Clogher. He mentions the Lambert Simnel Affair in two passages. The first described the circumstances around the Battle of Bosworth when he wrote that

'The king of the Saxons, namely, king Richard, was slain in battle and 1500 were slain in that battle and the son of a Welshman, he by whom the battle was given, was made king. And there lived not of the race of the blood royal that time but one young man, who came, on being exiled the year after, to Ireland.'

Annals of Ulster, Vol III, translated by B. Mac Carthy, Dublin, 1895, p299

This would tend to point to Edward, Earl of Warwick if it was believed that the Princes in the Tower were dead, though this is not something the Annals of Ulster does claim. To be fair though, it remains quiet on most Saxon matters that don't directly impact Ireland. The next passage where this lone son of the House of York is mentioned is in the section covering 1487 and the attempt by Lambert Simnel on Henry VII's throne.

'A great fleet of Saxons came to Ireland this year to meet the son of the Duke of York, who was exiled at that time with the earl of Kildare, namely, Gerald, son of Earl Thomas. And

there lived not of the race of the blood royal that time but that son of the Duke and he was proclaimed king on the Sunday of the Holy Ghost in the town of Ath-cliath that time. And he went east with the fleet and many of the Irish went with him east, under the brother of the Earl of Kildare, namely, Thomas, son of the Earl and under Edward Plunket, that is, Edward junior.'

Annals of Ulster, Vol III, translated by B. Mac Carthy, Dublin, 1895, pp315-7

This passage is awkward. It still maintains that this scion of the House of York was the last. However, he is described as a son of the Duke of York. If this refers to Warwick, then it must mean a grandson of the Duke of York and is perhaps just a slip. If it does refer to him, it is interesting that the writer describes him being exiled with the Earl of Kildare, because the attainder of Warwick's father in 1478 expressly charged George with trying to get his son out of the country either to Ireland or Burgundy. It does not state whether he failed or succeeded.

It may also merit consideration that the last Duke of York (assuming this was not a grown son of the (by now, if alive) 13-year-old Richard of Shrewsbury, Duke of York, the younger of the Princes in the Tower, was Edward IV. Why would the writer not refer to Edward IV? As mentioned, the Annals relate little of English affairs, and perhaps it was uncertain whether, under Henry VII, it was acceptable to refer to Yorkist kings. That argument struggles to hold water, though, since the writer has earlier referred to King Richard when discussing the Battle of Bosworth. If the writer uses 'son of the Duke of York' to mean a grandson of Richard, 3rd Duke of York, then it might refer to Warwick, Edward V or Richard of Shrewsbury (if the latter two were still alive). If he means a son of the last Duke of York, then he means a son of Edward IV. The reference to the last of the line is strongly suggestive that he means Warwick since he was known (in England at least) to be alive, but that would raise a query about Irish support for Perkin Warbeck. If they believed he was another son of the House of York, then they did not know that all but Warwick were dead. It is possible they meant Edward V, as the last hope of the House of York, unaware of the fates of Richard of Shrewsbury and Edward, Earl of Warwick. One thing that can be taken from these passages in that the writer seems convinced that the boy was who he claimed to be. There is no mention of imposture, of Lambert Simnel or of a boy from Oxford.

In January 1488, the Pope would write to the Irish prelates involved in the coronation to censure them for supporting Lambert. They had;

'adhered to and aided and abetted the enemies and rebels of the said king, and even de facto set up and crowned as king, falsely alleging him to be a son of the late duke of Clarence, a boy of illegitimate birth, whom the said king already had in his hands, thereby committing treason and incurring the said sentences.'

https://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-papal-registers/brit-ie/vol14/pp305-309

This was clearly after the official story had taken shape. Henry had told on the archbishops of Armagh and Dublin and the bishops of Meath and Kildare in order to have them censured. There are several very interesting slips in this story. In 1526, amongst the Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII is a note on Ireland that deviates from the official version

of events. The author is not mentioned, unfortunately, but the briefing is a summary of the state of affairs in Ireland over recent decades. The passage relating to the Lambert Simnel Affair tells the king that;

'Now that the King inherits the titles both of York and Lancaster, he will be better able to look after Ireland. There has been a similar dispute for the rule of Ireland between the Geraldines and the Butlers. The earls of Kildare and Desmond come of one stock, and have always held with the house of York, as was seen in the days of the King's father, "when an organ-maker's son (Lambert Simnel), named one of king Edward's sons, came into Ireland, was by the Geraldines received and crowned king in the city of Dublin, and with him the earl of Kildare's father sent his brother Thomas with much of his people, who with the earl of Lincoln, Martin Swart and others, gave a field unto the King's father, where the earl of Kildare's brother was slain."

'Henry VIII: August 1526, 11-20', in Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 4, 1524-1530, ed. J S Brewer (London, 1875), pp. 1066-1081. British History Online http://www.british-history.ac.uk/letters-papers-hen8/vol4/pp1066-1081 [accessed 24 July 2018]

The interesting fact here is that Lambert Simnel, while naturally portrayed as a fraud, is described as 'one of king Edward's sons'. Given that he was crowned, we are consistently told, King Edward, if he was a son of Edward IV, that makes him Edward V. The passage is in quotation marks, but if it refers to another source, that is not given. It is striking that what appears to be a private briefing for Henry VIII on Irish affairs is allowed to refer to Lambert Simnel as a son of Edward IV, not the son of George, Duke of Clarence as the official story under Henry VII insisted. At least in public. Was something else well known in private?

There is another source, far more contemporary, that throws serious doubt on the story Henry VII wanted and needed everyone to believe. It is all the more interesting because it comes from within Tudor circles. Bernard André was a blind friar-poet who acted as tutor to Prince Arthur Tudor and may have gone on to teach the future Henry VIII too. He wrote a life of Henry VII which is generally full of praise for his master, but when it comes to the Lambert Simnel Affair, he appears to utterly ignore the official story.

'While the cruel murder of King Edward the Fourth's sons was yet vexing the people, behold another new scheme that seditious men contrived. To cloak their fiction in a lie, they publicly proclaimed with wicked intent that a certain boy born the son of a miller or cobbler was the son of Edward the Fourth. This audacious claim so overcame them that they dreaded neither God nor man as they plotted their evil design against the king. Then, after they had hatched the fraud among themselves, word came back that the second son of Edward had been crowned king in Ireland. When a rumour of this kind had been reported to the king, he shrewdly questioned those messengers about every detail. Specifically, he carefully investigated how the boy was brought there and by whom, where he was educated, where he had lived for such a long time, who his friends were, and many other things of this sort.' *The Life of Henry VII, Bernard André, Translated by Daniel Hobbins, Italica Press, 2011, pp44-5*

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André has already, by this point, assured his readers that Richard III killed the Princes in the Tower. He sticks to the assertion that Lambert was an imposter, but he clearly states that he was claimed to be 'the son of Edward the Fourth'. He goes to explain that 'the second son of Edward had been crowned king in Ireland', so something does not add up in his account. He seems to be claiming that Lambert Simnel was set up as Richard of Shrewsbury, the second son of Edward IV, yet all other accounts have the boy claiming to be named Edward. Does Andre have the first and second sons mixed up, or is there another scenario emerging in which Lambert was claimed to be Richard of Shrewsbury? This alternative scenario was in circulation as late as 1797, when W. Bristow said that the Irish supported 'Lambert Simnel (the counterfeit duke of York)' (The History and Topographical Survey of the County of Kent: Volume 2, W. Bristow from https://www.british-history.ac.uk/survey-kent/vol2/pp184-203). Perhaps this is some confusion with Perkin Warbeck, but what we can take from André's statement here is that he understood the lad in Ireland was being touted as a son of Edward IV, not of the Duke of Clarence.

The friar does not stop there, though. He continues his account be explaining that;

'Various messengers were sent for a variety of reasons. At last [blank space] was sent across, who claimed that he would easily recognise him if he were who he claimed to be. But the boy had already been tutored with evil cunning by persons who were familiar with the days of Edward, and he very readily answered all the herald's questions. To make a long story short, through the deceptive tutelage of his advisors, he was finally accepted as Edward's son by many prudent men, and so strong was this belief that many did not even hesitate to die for him.'

The Life of Henry VII, Bernard André, Translated by Daniel Hobbins, Italica Press, 2011, p45

André here asserts that several messengers were sent to Ireland to find out what was going on. Finally, a herald volunteered to go on the basis that he had known Edward IV and his sons and would recognise the boy if he was who he claimed to be. Already, feeling the need to take such a step confirms that Henry VII cannot have known with any certainty that the sons of Edward IV were dead. Even more astoundingly, the herald returned to inform Henry that the boys had answered every question posed of him, and he did not say he did not recognise the boy, or that his looks made it impossible for him to be a son of Edward IV. In fact, he confirms that 'he was finally accepted as Edward's son by man prudent men'.

Frustratingly, André leaves a blank space in his manuscript where the name of the herald was surely meant to appear. It has been suggested that this herald might have been Roger Machado, a man of Portuguese extraction who had served Edward IV and Richard III before going on to work as a herald and ambassador, with no small amount of success, for Henry VII. If it were Machado who made the trip, he would have been well placed to examine the boy's looks and interrogate his knowledge of Edward IV's times, his family and the like. Perhaps the most interesting fact about Machado about this episode is that he is known to have kept a house in Southampton. On Simnel Street. So, if we are wondering where that name Lambert Simnel came from, we perhaps have a possible explanation.

Several sources seem to very clearly oppose the official story that the uprising of 1487 was in favour of Edward, Earl of Warwick and instead insist that it was in the name of one of Edward IV's sons. Given that it is generally accepted that the lad was crowned King Edward, that would make him Edward V, though it remains possible he was in fact crowned Richard IV and was claimed to be the younger of the Princes in the Tower. Clearly this was a severe issue for Henry VII, and I suspect that the name Edward gave them a splendid get-out-of-jail-free card because it allowed them to undermine the attempt by portraying it as a farcical plot in favour of Edward, Earl of Warwick, who was a prisoner in the Tower.



Edward, Earl of Warwick

The other key thing to consider in the events of 1487 are the actions of some of those who might have had a vested interest. In the absence of evidence, which Henry VII would have an interest in suppressing or destroying (we know he destroyed Titulus Regius and the records of the 1487 Irish Parliament – what we don't know is what else he had destroyed), the actions of these people should be instructive and offer an indication of what they knew, or at least believed. The first of these is Elizabeth Woodville, the widow of Edward IV and mother of the Princes in the Tower. At a council meeting, probably held at Sheen Palace around 3 March 1487, the plot developing in Ireland was on the agenda. Another of the outcomes of this meeting was the removal of all Elizabeth Woodville's properties, which were granted to her daughter, Henry VII's wife, Elizabeth of York. Elizabeth Woodville was given a small pension and retired to Bermondsey Abbey. It has long been asserted that this was voluntary and had been planned by the former queen, but there is no real evidence to support that idea, and the timing is indeed suspicious. Many subsequent writers have believed that Elizabeth was being dealt with because she was suspected of involvement in the Lambert Simnel Affair (notably argued against by Henry VII, S.B. Chrimes, Yale University Press, 1999, p76 n3).

If this was true, the question that must be asked is what Elizabeth Woodville stood to gain from backing an attempt to place Edward, Earl of Warwick on the throne. Nothing at all. Her daughter was already queen consort and replacing Henry with her deceased husband's nephew would hardly improve her position. In fact, it has long been claimed (by

Mancini amongst others) that Elizabeth Woodville was at least viewed as implicated in George, Duke of Clarence's fall and execution. She could hardly have hoped to profit by placing his son on the throne when he may well seek revenge upon her. There is only one circumstance in which Elizabeth Woodville's position would be improved from having a daughter on the throne as queen consort, and that is having a son on the throne as king. Her involvement in a plot in favour of Warwick makes no sense whatsoever. Her suspected support for a scheme in favour of one of her sons with Edward IV makes perfect sense.

The involvement of the Woodville faction, or at least the suspicion of it, is further evinced by the arrest of Thomas Grey, Marquis of Dorset, at the same time as his mother was deprived of her property. Thomas was reportedly placed in the Tower, and when he protested that he had done nothing wrong, he was told that if he were really loyal to Henry VII, then he wouldn't mind a spell in prison. The anecdotal story is a window into some strange Tudor logic, but also the fear that the broader Woodville faction was involved in the plot. The one thing that doesn't add up is that Sir Edward Woodville, Elizabeth's brother, was part of Henry's army at Stoke Field. He seems to have escaped suspicion, perhaps not believing the story or maybe even ensuring he got there to see the boy for himself.

Another whose actions are hard to comprehend if the plot was in favour of Warwick is John de la Pole, Earl of Lincoln. John was in his mid-twenties by 1487 and was the oldest nephew of Edward IV and Richard III. His mother was their sister, Elizabeth, Duchess of Suffolk. Although his descent was therefore in a female line, the entire claim of the House of York was based on the Mortimer descent in the female line so this cannot have been a bar to his chances of succession. After the death of Richard III's only legitimate son, Edward of Middleham, it is likely that John would have been considered Richard's heir presumptive since Warwick was still legally barred from the succession by his father's attainder. If the Princes in the Tower were dead, and Warwick a prisoner barred from succession, then in 1487, the House of York had a ready-made, adult claimant. John's younger brothers would go on to claim the throne, interestingly, only after Lambert Simnel had failed and Perkin Warbeck had been executed. The only two people with a better claim to the throne for the House of York in 1487 than John de la Pole were Edward V and Richard of Shrewsbury. They had been re-legitimised by Henry VII so that he could marry their sister, thus handing a dangerously popular and legal claim to those two boys in the process. It has long been suggested that Henry's willingness to do this demonstrates his understanding that the boys were dead, but it is clear, not least from the Perkin Warbeck Affair, that no one knew this for certain. It is more likely that mounting pressure from Henry's Yorkist support base, which had won him the throne and was keeping him in government, had to be appeased by the completion of his promised marriage, whatever the fallout might be. Failure to complete it would almost certainly have sparked a rebellion.

John clearly overlooked his own perfectly good and perfectly legal claim in 1487. There was no question that he really was John de la Pole, yet he chose, we are told, to follow a fake boy from Oxford who claimed to be the Earl of Warwick, a boy who was legally barred from the succession. What could possibly have led John (and indeed others – Francis Lovell and Margaret of York, Duchess of Burgundy most significantly) to make that decision? Even if

they had succeeded in their invasion and reached the real Warwick in the Tower (if that was the real Warwick – confused yet??), the boy had no natural support or power base to build a kingship on. John actually posed an altogether better option than Warwick. Something made him overlook his own claim, and the only better claim lay with Edward V or Richard, Duke of York.

I have become increasingly convinced that the Lambert Simnel Affair as history has recorded it is a lie. The claim that Edward, Earl of Warwick was claimed to be the figurehead by the rebels cannot be evidenced, and even Tudor sources point to a claim that he was one or other of the Princes in the Tower. I suspect that the invasion was in favour of, and was perhaps led by, Edward V, who would have been 16 years old by early 1487. The use of the name Edward was seized upon by the fledgeling Tudor government to make a mockery of the plot by claiming that it favoured Edward, Earl of Warwick, a boy who was barred from the succession, had no personal support and was demonstrably a prisoner in the Tower of London. It was a clever sleight of hand that has stuck well. I suspect that the coronation in Dublin was seen as a missing piece of the jigsaw of Edward V's kingship. Much like Henry III's, it was a temporary stopgap to give credence to his planned invasion and could be confirmed later at Westminster Abbey. Messengers sent to Ireland, according to André, reported back that the lad was a son of Edward IV, and that fact makes sense of the suspected involvement of Elizabeth Woodville and her son Thomas Grey. It also accounts for John de la Pole setting aside his own claim and backing this plan.

The herald's report from the Battle of Stoke Field that a boy named John was captured might well be accurate. Why would a herald lie and undermine his office to oppose the official version of events? Even if this is accepted, it leaves several questions unanswered (and unanswerable). Was the 'John' taken at the battle really the figurehead of this invasion or a boy amongst the army or its train who made a convenient 'Lambert' for Henry? If he was really Edward V or Richard of Shrewsbury, was he the same person then placed in the royal kitchens? That would seem unlikely, but he could have been switched with another boy, glad of the security of a job in royal service. Edward or Richard might then have been found a new, secret identity, or killed. The figurehead of the invasion might have been killed amidst the slaughter of Stoke Field, an outcome that would have worked for Henry if he was one of the Princes, and he had a boy to pass off as Lambert. Alternatively, this figurehead may have escaped. Adrien de But claims he was whisked to Calais and onto the continent to safety by Edmund de la Pole, younger brother of John. Did he slip into obscurity, or re-emerge a few years later as Perkin Warbeck?

The *Book of Howth*, a record of one of the Irish families prominent at the time (though the surviving manuscript copy belonged to the contemporary Lord's grandson, so precisely when it was compiled is not clear) and it too offers an interesting insight into the aftermath of Stoke Field. In 1489, Henry VII hosted the Irish nobility at a feast in London designed to reassert his authority and improve relations with Ireland. It is here that the *Book of Howth* credits Henry with the famous quip that 'My Masters of Ireland, you will crown apes at length' as a jab at their willingness to use an imposter against him. The passage also refers to an incident during the feast, meant by Henry as a joke, but which may have backfired.

'This same day at dinner, whereas these Lords of Ireland was at Court, a gentleman came where as they was at dinner, and told them that their new King Lambarte Symenell brought them wine to drink, and drank to them all. None would have taken the cup out of his hands, but bade the great Devil of Hell him take before that ever they saw him.' reproduced in The Dublin King, J. Ashdown-Hill, The History Press, 2015, p156

The implication that can be drawn from the passage is that the Irish lords had to be told that the person serving their wine to them was the boy whose coronation most of them had attended two years earlier. No one had recognised the lad, presumably the one taken prisoner at Stoke Field – perhaps Robert Bellingham's John – as the boy crowned in Ireland. Did they feign not to recognise him? Did the servant drift around the room utterly unnoticed? Or did Henry's prank backfire when it became apparent that this was not the boy they had lauded as their king? Perhaps Henry knew he was not, but wanted to force the Irish lords to acknowledge that their plot had failed and was over.

After writing a book about the Princes in the Tower, the most commonly asked question has been what I think happened to them both. I have always tended to believe Perkin Warbeck could really have been Richard of Shrewsbury, and nothing in researching the book has altered that belief, though obviously it cannot yet be proven either way definitively. The Lambert Simnel Affair has tended to slip by as a joke, and I wonder whether that wasn't the very design of the Tudor government. If pressed, I would suggest now that the Lambert Simnel Affair was an uprising in favour of one of the Princes in the Tower, most likely a 16-year-old Edward V. I accept that it remains beyond proof, but I think it is a worthy addition to discussions of what might have happened.



Edward V