Choice 20

Walpole's Portfolio for His *Historic Doubts of the Life and Reign of Richard III*

"It occured to me," Walpole wrote in the Preface to his *Historic Doubts,* "that the picture of Richard the Third, as drawn by historians, was a character formed by prejudice and invention. I did not take Shakespeare's tragedy for a genuine representation, but I did take the story of that reign for a tragedy of imagination. Many of the crimes imputed to Richard seemed improbable; and, what was stronger, contrary to his interest."

"All I mean to show," Walpole began, "is that though [Richard] may have been as execrable as we are told he was, we have little or no reason to believe so. If the propensity of habit should still incline a single man to *suppose* that all he has read of Richard is true, I beg no more, than that person would be so impartial as to own that he has little or no foundation for supposing so.

"I will state the list of the crimes charged on Richard; I will specify the authorities on which he was accused; I will give a faithful account of the historians by whom he was accused; and will then examine the circumstances of each crime and each evidence; and lastly, show that some of the crimes were contrary to Richard's interest, and almost all inconsistent with probability or with dates, and some of them involved in material contradictions.

SUPPOSED CRIMES OF RICHARD THE THIRD.

1st. *His murder of Edward Prince of Wales, son of Henry the Sixth.*
2d. *His murder of Henry the Sixth.*
3d. *The murder of his brother George Duke of Clarence.*
4th. *The execution of Rivers, Gray, and Vaughan.*
5th. *The execution of Lord Hastings.*
6th. *The murder of Edward the Fifth and his brother.*
7th. *The murder of his own queen.*

To which may be added, as they are thrown into the list to blacken him, his intended match with his own niece Elizabeth, the penance of Jane Shore, and his own personal deformities."

Walpole became convinced as a young man that Richard had been maligned by the Lancastrian and Tudor historians who reported his reign; that is, Richard was an underdog and should be championed. When two eminent antiquarians called his attention to what they believed was the coronation roll, which showed that Edward V, far from having been murdered in the Tower by his uncle Richard, had walked at his coronation, Walpole determined to clear Richard of "the mob-stories" that put him "on a level with Jack the giant-killer." In his Preface he waved away possible criticism: his attempt, he said, was "mere matter of curiosity and speculation" of an idle man; he was ready to yield to better reasons, but not to " 'declamation.' " Unfortunately, the coronation roll turned out to be a wardrobe account of no relevance. This was disappointing, but it didn't weaken Walpole's desire to defend Richard.

Why did he get so excited about him? An explanation was given me years ago in London by the psychoanalyst Dr M. J. Mannheim that goes deeper than Walpole's stated wish to rescue Richard from the cupidity of Lancastrian and Tudor historians. This is that Walpole loved and hated his father; part of him regarded his father as a monster who had treated his adored mother badly; Richard was a monster; by defending Richard, Walpole was atoning for his suppressed hatred of Sir Robert. We are here at the point in biography beyond which, Plutarch tells us, there "is nothing but dark unpassable bogs, or Scythian cold, or frozen sea."

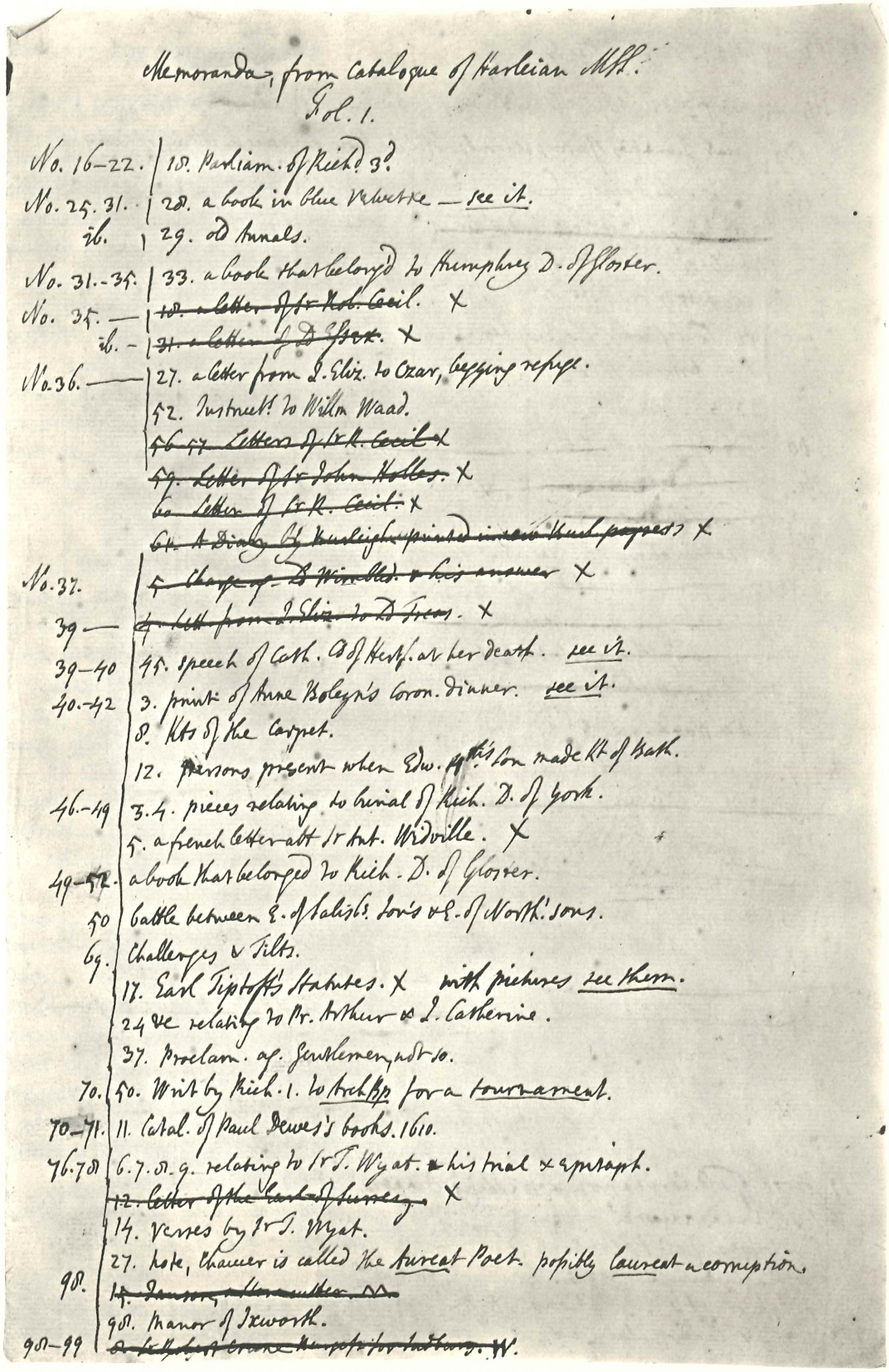
Walpole summed up his attitude towards Richard in a letter to a fellow-antiquary fifteen years after *Historic Doubts* appeared.

Give me leave in my own behalf to say, that if I am prejudiced, as probably I am, it is *against* those historians, not *for* Richard III. I did apprehend originally that I should be suspected of the latter, because when one contests popular prejudices, one is supposed to run into the contrary extreme. I do believe Richard was a very bad man—but I could not think him a weak one, which he must have been, had he acted in the absurd manner imputed to him. I am aware on the other side, that in so dark and ferocious an age, he and others may have acted very differently, and ventured on many steps, that would be preposterous in a more enlightened time—but then we ought to have a very good evidence of their having done so—and such evidence is very defective indeed.

Walpole's notes for the book are at Farmington. He kept them in the Glass Closet in a portfolio I am rescuing as this Choice. The 1842 Sale Catalogue called it "A portfolio containing original letters, deeds, extracts, etc. on the subject of the Historic Doubts on the Life of Richard III, written by Mr Walpole." It named some of his correspondents and added that the portfolio contained the proof sheets of the books' first edition, but it failed to mention Walpole's notes on the sources he used to write the book. Boone bought the lot for Lord Derby who put it into a linen case. The letters to Walpole about the book were those that Major Milner laid out around the billiard table for me at Knowsley in 1935. He didn't show me the other manuscripts in the portfolio, but their significance would have been lost on one unfamiliar with the immense complexities of Richard's story. Maggs bought the lot for me at Sotheby's in the 1954 Derby Sale. The reviewer of the sale in the *Times Literary Supplement* singled out the proof sheets, the only Walpolian ones I know of except those for the second edition of the *Royal and Noble Authors* already mentioned, but Walpole made few corrections in them and they are less interesting than other pieces in the lot.

The portfolio is now in a case worthier of its contents, but they have yet to be studied by a fifteenth-century specialist. His task will not be light, for Walpole jotted down his notes on slips of paper and left them in a general jumble. We'll see the same casual confusion when we come to his memoirs. Here in the portfolio is a scrap of six by four inches with 46 miscellaneous notes crowded to the margins on both sides. Next is a small card with five notes, including "H[enry] 7 did not reverse his Queen's Bastardy." A more extensive note quotes the late Lord Bolingbroke as saying "that the Ambassadors of France and Venice who were present at Richard's coronation wrote to their respective superiors that Richard was a handsome well made Prince." "By the favour of the Duchess of Choiseul," Walpole wrote, "I have had the Depot des affaires étrangères at Versailles carefully examined by the learned and ingenious Abbé Barthelemi, and with the same truth with which I have conducted this inquiry, I must declare that no such account is to be found among the state papers of the King of France. If I discover anything that makes against my own arguments, I shall declare it with the same impartiality. It is indifferent to me on which side the truth may come out, all my aim has been to lead to the discovery of it."

There are twelve and a half pages of manuscript references to the Harleian Manuscripts in the British Museum. Walpole listed them from



Memoranda from Catalogue of Harleian Mss.

Vol. 1.

No. 16–22. | 19. Parliam. of Richd 3d.

No. 25. 31. | 28. a book in blue Velvet 8vo — see it.

ib. | 29. old Annals.

No. 31.–35. | 33. a Book that belonged to Humphrey D. of Gloster.

No. 35. — | ~~30. a letter of Sr Rob. Cecil.~~ X

ib. – | ~~31. a letter of D Glost.~~ X

No. 36. — | 27. a Letter from Q. Eliz. to Czar, begging refuge.

52. Instruct.s to Willm Waad.

~~56 57 Letters of Sr R. Cecil~~ X

~~59. Letter of Sr John Holles.~~ X

60 Letter of Sr R. Cecil X

~~64. A Diary of Burleigh printed in new Hall papers~~ X

No. 37. | ~~5 Charge of D Norfolk & his answer~~ X

39 — | ~~4. Lett from Q Eliz to D Tresa~~. X

39–40 | 45. Speech of Cath. Ds of Kents. at her death. see it.

40.–42 | 3. print.s of Anne Boleyn's Coron. dinner. see it.

8. Kts of the Carpet.

12. persons present when Edw. 4th's son made Kt of Bath.

46.–49 | 3.4. pieces relating to burial of Rich. D. of York.

5. a french letter att Sr Anth. Wydville. X

49–52. | a book that belonged to Rich. D. of Gloster.

50 | battle between E. of Salisb.s Son's & E. of Worth.s sons.

69. | Challenges & Tilts.

17. Earl Tiptoft's Statutes. X with pictures see them.

24 &c relating to Pr. Arthur & Q. Catherine.

37. Proclam. of Gentlemen pnsrs &c.

70. | 50. Writ by Rich. 1. to Archbp for a tournament.

70–71. | 11. Catal. of Paul Dewes's books. 1610.

76.78 | 6.7.8.9. relating to Sr T. Wyat. & his trial & epitaph.

~~12. Letter of the Earl of Surrey~~ X

14. Verses by Sr T. Wyat.

27. Note, Chaucer is called the Surreat Poet. pophly Laureat a corruption.

98. | ~~15. Damon, a Manuscript~~

98. Manor of Ixworth.

98–99 | ~~a Collection of Evidences &c printed for Anthony Wood~~

Horace Walpole's Memoranda from Catalogue of Harleian Manuscripts.

his printed copy of the *Catalogue,* which came to Farmington from the Library of Congress by exchange. So we have, most happily, not only Walpole's notes but his annotated source for them. The list of manuscripts has his characteristic crosses and dashes and an occasional "See it." That he went to the Museum to do so is proved by his quotations in *Historic Doubts* from the Harleian Manuscripts. For example, a footnote on page 39 of *Historic Doubts* exculpates Richard from charging his mother publicly with adultery. Walpole quoted an affectionate letter from Richard to her in Harleian Manuscript, no. 433.6. How, Walpole asked, could a son who wrote such a letter have said his mother was an adulteress? Opposite the reference to the letter in his copy of the printed *Catalogue* Walpole made a large asterisk in ink; and in his manuscript list he added "See this book" after "Letter of Richard 3d to his Mother." He confused matters by getting the Harleian Manuscript number wrong in his footnote and printing 2236.6 instead of 433.6, an error apparently unnoticed until now.

Dodsley published twelve hundred copies of *Historic Doubts* in 1768 and sold them so fast he began printing a second edition of one thousand copies the following day, a remarkable sale for the time. The book is a quarto with two illustrations by Vertue. The original of one of them, Richard and his Queen in its Walpolian frame, came to Farmington from Sotheby's in 1936. When I got the catalogue of the sale the drawing stood out as a "must" for me, but what was it worth? This was twenty years before Walpoliana shot into the stratosphere and the limit of £100 that I gave Maggs seemed extravagant, but it proved to be ample, for the drawing was knocked down to us at £2, less than half of what Miss Burdett-Coutts gave for it in 1842. The surviving collectors of the thirties look back to that time as to a lost paradise.

Historic Doubts caused a furor in the learned world when it appeared, for it is a pioneer work that challenged the traditional picture of Richard as a figure of unmitigated evil. Gray and Cole stood loyally by; Gibbon praised Walpole highly, but shared Hume's belief that Sir Thomas More's account of Richard was closer to the truth than Walpole's. Gibbon's copy, which Walpole gave him, is at Farmington, but has, alas, no notes. Among our other eighteen presentation copies are many to Walpole's antiquarian friends whose notes and comments in their copies will be of interest to future editors of the work, which continues to be, and doubtless always will be, controversial.

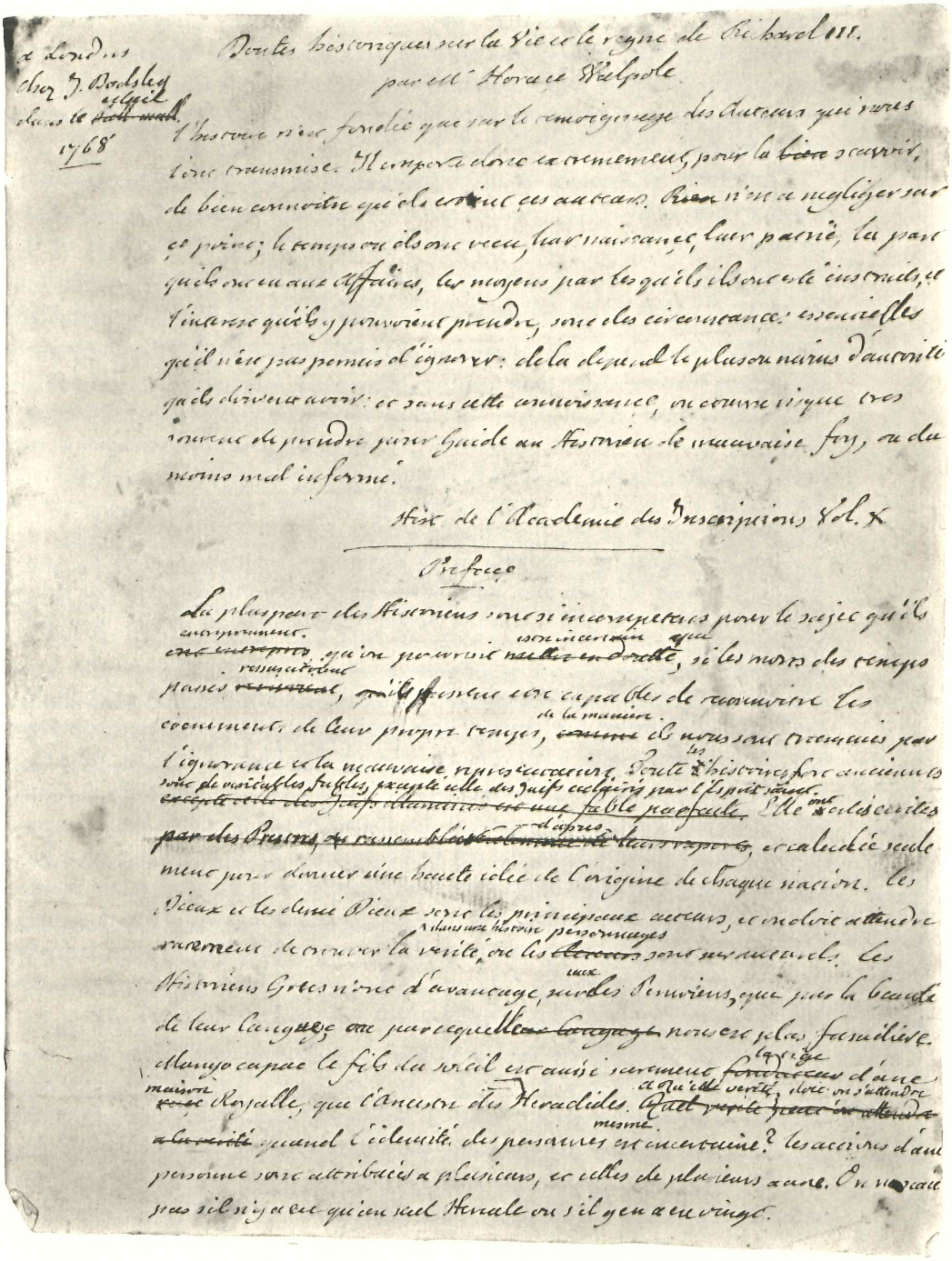
One of the strongest dissidents in 1768 was Dean Jeremiah Milles,

Richard III and His Queen by Vertue.

President of the Society of Antiquaries, of which Walpole was a member; another was the Rev. Robert Masters. He and Milles expressed their views in *Archaeologia,* the Society of Antiquaries' annual volume, whereupon Walpole rather foolishly resigned from the Society. He printed a *Reply to Dean Milles,* in six copies only, one of which is at Farmington.

His dismissal of Masters occurs in a letter to Cole, 7 April 1778, a letter that played an accidental part in launching the Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence. In a talk to the Modern Language Association at New Haven in 1932 on the need for the new edition, a talk sponsored by Frederick A. Pottle, I pointed out that no one could open any edition of Walpole's letters at random and not need help a dozen times on the first page he read. I made this test and turned up the letter to Cole about Masters's attack on *Historic Doubts.* Walpole wrote, "I have now seen the second volume of the *Archaeologia.* . . . with Mr Masters's answer to me. If he had not taken such pains to declare it was written against my *Doubts,* I should have thought it a defence of them, for the few facts he quotes make for my arguments, and confute himself; particularly in the case of Lady Eleanor Butler; whom, by the way, he makes marry her own nephew, and not descend from her own family, because she was descended from her grandfather. This Mr. Masters is an excellent Sancho Panza to such a Don Quixote as Dean Milles! but enough of such goosecaps!" To explain all this a footnote of 500 words was ultimately written in the Yale Walpole.

Masters's attack in *Archaeologia* turned up again in 1944 after *Life Magazine* printed a six-page article, "Life Explores World's Finest Walpole Library." It was read by Mr Harold H. Nelson, Field Director of the Oriental Institute at Luxor, Egypt, which is part of the University of Chicago. He kindly wrote to say Walpole's own copies of the first twelve volumes of *Archaeologia* were in their Library. When I replied that I also had the twelve volumes in excellent condition and asked if there was any possibility of the Institute following other public institutions and exchanging their copies for mine, the librarian replied that he would be delighted to do so, but that the decision rested with Professor John A. Wilson at the University of Chicago. I began my letter to him, "Dear John, When we were exchanging little notes in the O.S.S. I had no idea that I would one day be writing you on a really important matter." He replied that so far as he was concerned I was more than welcome to Walpole's set, but that the person who had the final say about it was Professor Jesse H. Shera of the University Library. So I wrote, "Dear Jesse," for he had been my number one assistant in the O.S.S.'s Central Intelligence Division. The



Londres
chez J. Dodsley
dans le Pall mall.
1768

Doutes historiques sur la Vie et le regne de Richard III.
par M^r Horace Walpole

L'histoire n'est fondée que sur le témoignage des auteurs qui nous
l'ont transmise. Il importe donc extrêmement, pour la bien savoir,
de bien connoître quels sont ces auteurs. Rien n'est à négliger sur
ce point; le temps où ils ont vécu, leur naissance, leur patrie, la part
qu'ils ont eu aux affaires, les moyens par lesquels ils sont arrivés à
l'instruction qu'ils y puisoient prendre, sont des circonstances essentielles
qu'il n'est pas permis d'ignorer: de là dépend le plus ou moins d'autorité
qu'ils doivent avoir: et sans cette connoissance, on court risque très
souvent de prendre pour guide un historien de mauvaise foy, ou du
moins mal informé.

Hist. de l'Académie des Inscriptions Vol. X.

Preface

La plupart des historiens sont si incorrects pour le sujet qu'ils
entreprennent, qu'on ne peut avoir aucune confiance en ce qu'ils
ressuscitent, si les noms des temps
passés ne sont, il est rare qu'ils soient capables de reconnoître les
événemens de leur propre temps, et nous sommes accoutumés par
l'ignorance et la mauvaise critique de leurs ancêtres. Toute l'histoire
de la
avant le déluge est remplie de merveilles fabuleuses, excepté celle des Juifs inspirés par l'Esprit saint.
Celle des premiers Romains est une fable populaire. Et de même
par des Poëmes, et presque toutes les
d'après
Nations ont recours à leurs rapports, et calculée seule
ment pour donner une haute idée de l'origine de chaque nation. Les
Dieux et les demi Dieux sont les principaux acteurs, et on doit attendre
dans une histoire
seulement de trouver la vérité, où les personnages sont surnaturels. Les
Historiens Grecs n'ont d'avantage
aux
sur les Romains, que par la beauté
de leur langue, ont par conséquent rendu cet âge plus fameux.
Memnon capitaine de fils du soleil est aussi sérieusement
l'âge
fondateur d'une
d'Qu'elle vérité, doit on s'attendre
maison Persique Persalle, que l'ancêtre des Heraclides. Quel
même
à la vérité quand l'absurdité des personnes est incontestable? les actions d'une
personne sont attribuées à plusieurs, et celles de plusieurs à une. On ne sait
pas s'il n'y a eu qu'un seul Hercule ou s'il y en a eu vingt.

First page of Louis XVI's translation of *Historic Doubts*.

Egyptian Government were much more loath to let the books come to Farmington, but after a year they arrived. You can imagine with what feelings I opened the second volume and hurried to Masters's article. I was certain Walpole had annotated it profusely and I was quite right, but he did so in pencil and some tidy custodian had carefully erased every one of his notes.

Therefore, Walpole's set of *Archaeologia* is not the runner-up in this Choice, nor is his copy (one of six only) of the *Historic Doubts* that he printed at the Press in his 1770 *Works,* even though at the end of it he bound in the manuscript of "Postscript to My Historic Doubts, written in Febr. 1793" that was published in his 1798 *Works.* The Postscript begins,

> It is afflictive to have lived to find in an Age called not only civilized but enlightened, in this eighteenth century, that such horrors, such unparalleled crimes have been displayed on the most conspicuous Theatre in Europe, in Paris, the rival of Athens and Rome. . . . by a Royal Duke, who has actually surpassed all the guilt imputed to Richard the 3d: and who . . . will leave it impossible to any future writer, how ever disposed to candour, to entertain one historic doubt on the abominable actions of Philip Duke of Orleans.
>
> After long plotting the death of his Sovereign, a victim as holy as, and infinitely superior in sense and many virtues to Henry 6th, Orleans has dragged that sovereign to the block, and purchased his execution in public, as in public he voted for it.

"That sovereign" provided the runner-up in this Choice. When Mme du Deffand received her copy of the book from Walpole she was *extasiée,* yet not as much as she wished to be because she had no English. She failed to find a translator and died twenty years before the first French translation appeared in 1800. Walpole did not live to see it either, and so missed what I think might have meant more to him than anything else in his life. This was the knowledge that he had indirectly eased the last weeks of the translator as he revised his manuscript while waiting for the mob to come and drag him away to the guillotine. For the first French translator of *Historic Doubts of the Life and Reign of Richard III* was Louis XVI, and his much worked over manuscript is now at Farmington.