HISTORICAL INQUIRES REPECTING THE CHARACTER OF EDWARD HYDE, EARL OF CLARENDON, LORD CHANCELLOR OF ENGLAND

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GEORGE AGAR ELLIS

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HISTORICAL INQUIRIES

RESPECTING

THE CHARACTER

OF

EDWARD HYDE, EARL OF CLARENDON

LORD CHANCELLOR OF ENGLAND.

BY THE

HON. GEORGE AGAR ELLIS.

Omne animi vitium tantò conspectius in se
Crimen habet, quantò major, qui peccat, habetur.
JUVENAL.

LONDON:
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TO

HENRY WELBORE,

VISCOUNT CLIFDEN,

THE VARIETY AND ACCURACY OF WHOSE

HISTORICAL KNOWLEDGE

HAVE BEEN EVER THE SUBJECT OF

THE AUTHOR'S ADMIRATION,

THESE PAGES ARE DEDICATED

WITH EVERY SENTIMENT OF

AFFECTIONATE REGARD

AND

FILIAL RESPECT.

HISTORICAL INQUIRIES,

&c. &c.

The observations, with which Lord Orford commences his "Historic Doubts on the Life and Reign of King Richard III.," explain so well the difficulties a writer has to encounter, who attempts to detect errors in generally-received points of history, that I cannot forbear transcribing them, as a sort of preface to the historical inquiries, which I am about to introduce to the notice of the literary public. "There is a kind of literary superstition," observes Lord Orford,

"which men are apt to contract from habit, and which makes them look on any attempt towards shaking their belief in established characters, no matter whether good or bad, as a sort of profanation. They are determined to adhere to their first impressions, and are equally offended at any innovation, whether the person, whose character is to be raised or depressed, were patriot or tyrant, saint or sinner. No indulgence is granted to those who would ascertain the truth. The more testimonies on either side have been multiplied, the stronger is the conviction; though it generally happens that the original evidence is wondrous slender, and that the number of writers have but copied one another; or, what is worse, have only added to the original, without any new

authority. Attachment so groundless is not to be regarded; and in mere matters of curiosity, it were ridiculous to pay any deference to it. If time brings new materials to light, if facts and dates confute historians, what does it signify that we have been two or three hundred years under an error? Does antiquity consecrate darkness? Does a lie become venerable from its age?"*

The difference between the task Lord Orford undertook, and the one which I am at present commencing, consists in this, that his discoveries all tended to show the individual, who was the subject of his inquiries, in a more favourable light; while the remarks and extracts which I shall have to bring forward, are

* Works of Horace Walpole, Earl of Orford, vol. ii.