

The True Catherine of Aragon.

(According to Italian Archives.)

IN view of the interest aroused by Mr. Froude's version of "The Divorce of Catherine of Aragon as told by the Imperial Ambassadors at the Court of Henry VIII.," the contents of the Italian archives may perhaps be laid bare with advantage. It is true that Mr. Froude has consulted the Venetian Calendar of state papers; but he does not profess to have examined it minutely, and the passages he quotes are far from representative. For instance he gives us, from Falieri's description of the King, a number of complimentary references to "such beauty of mind and body as surprise and astonish," "a face like an angel's," "a head bald¹ like Cæsar's," and many accomplishments as a scholar and a sportsman; but he entirely omits the following passage in the same despatch, which reflects far more correctly the real sentiments of the writer. "Although always intelligent and judicious," writes Falieri, "Henry has nevertheless allowed himself to be so allured by his pleasures that, accustomed to ease, he for many years left the administration of government to his ministers, well nigh up to the time of Cardinal Wolsey's persecution; but, ever since, he has taken such delight in his own rule that from liberal he has become avaricious, and, whereas no one heretofore departed from his Majesty without being well rewarded, so now all quit his presence dissatisfied." Moreover the religious observances quoted by Mr. Froude are in the original sneeringly suggested to be a semblance and a sham.

Mr. Froude has doubtless exercised a similar discretion in selecting descriptions of the other chief actors in this great drama, for the general consensus of the documents in Italy is far from bearing out the impressions he seeks to convey. Especially is this so in the case of Queen Catherine, whom he depicts as ugly, proud and intractable. Had he been specially

¹ Mr. Rawdon Brown, in his preface to the Venetian Calendar, gives this baldness as the reason why no painter ever dared represent the King without a bonnet.

concerned with the Venetian despatches, he would doubtless have given emphatic prominence to the reported assertion of the French King,¹ that Catherine was "old² and deformed," a view which was not shared by less partial observers. For instance, the Venetian Ambassador in England described her some months later as "possessed of a very beautiful complexion, and as religious and virtuous as words could express."³ A dozen years later Mario Savorgnano gives a graphic account of a visit to the Queen, which is to be found in the Sanuto diaries.⁴ "Her Majesty," he says, "is prudent and good, and during these differences with the King she has evinced constancy and resolution, never being disheartened or depressed. I returned to Windsor Castle, and from thence, on the fourth day of my departure from London, arrived at a place called The More, where the Queen resides. In the morning we saw her Majesty dine. She had some thirty maids of honour standing round the table and about fifty who performed its service. Her Court consists of about two hundred persons, but she is not so much visited as heretofore, on account of the King. Her Majesty is not of tall stature, but rather small. If not handsome, she is certainly not ugly; she is inclined to be stout; generally has a smile on her countenance."

Neither do the Italian despatches bear out the charges of "pride and intractability" so airily made against the Queen. When Henry was living in open adultery with Sir Thomas Boleyn's daughter, the Milanese agent reported that "this saintly Queen maintains strenuously (*contende summâ contentione*) that all her King and lord does is done by him for true and pure conscience's sake, and not from any wanton appetite;"⁵ when she had been driven away from Court to make room for her rival, we find her "maintaining a cheerful demeanour and arraying her retinue in entirely new apparel, with a monogram signifying 'Henry and Catherine'";⁶ and when Henry issued a proclamation threatening the penalties of *præmunire* against any who should in future style or address Catherine as Queen, she only

¹ Antonio Giustinian and Antonio Surian, Venetian Ambassadors in France, to the Signory, 4 June, 1519.

² She was then barely thirty-five.

³ Report of England by Sebastian Giustinian, 10 September, 1519. (S. Mark's Library.)

⁴ 25 August, 1531.

⁵ Scarpinello to the Duke of Milan, 28 June, 1530.

⁶ Carlo Capello to the Signory of Venice, 21 June, 1533.

remarked "that everything belonged to his Majesty, including her own person, of which he might dispose at his pleasure, but she neither could nor would cede her rights."¹ Indeed all accounts agree in extolling her gentle dignity throughout her troubles, and even "bluff King Hal" was constrained to a show of courtesy in her presence. As late as 1530, Scarpinello writes to the Duke of Milan, "the Queen is with his Majesty at Hampton Court, and they pay each other, reciprocally, the greatest possible attention and compliments in the Spanish fashion, with the utmost *sangfroid*, as if there had never been any dispute whatever between them, so much reciprocal courtesy being displayed in public that anyone acquainted with the controversy cannot but consider their conduct more than human."

Meanwhile it was not unnatural that this noble and unfortunate lady should arouse widespread sympathy among the people of England. Mr. Froude seeks to make light of this, but the fact remains that the Archives contain no single mention of any demonstration in favour of the King. Sir John Wallop, English Ambassador to the French Court, expressed much indignation at her treatment, "praising the wisdom, innocence and patience of Queen Catherine, and saying that her Majesty was beloved as if she had been of the blood royal of England."² Many recalled instances of the Queen's tenderness of heart and love for the people. They told how the King had destined four hundred rioters for the gallows, "but our most serene and most compassionate Queen, on her bended knees and with tears in her eyes, obtained their pardon from his Majesty, the act of grace being performed with great ceremony;"³ and it is characteristic that the last letter which she wrote from Windsor Castle was one of kindness, soliciting the Duke of Milan's good offices for a favourite servant.⁴ On the other hand, Marin Giustinian writes to the Signory of Venice, "the English King is not popular with his subjects, chiefly on account of his intention to divorce his wife, who is much loved,"⁵ and, according to a later ambassador, "a rebellion might easily break out some day and cause great confusion."⁶

¹ *Ibid.*, 12 July, 1533.

² Sforza Archives, 16 December, 1530.

³ Marin Giustinian to the Signory of Venice, 15 April, 1533.

⁴ Mantuan Archives, 19 May, 1517.

⁵ Preface to Venetian Calendar, vol. iv.

⁶ 13 March, 1533.

⁷ Carlo Capello to the Signory of Venice, 3 June, 1535.

Anne Boleyn, as the fount and origin of all the evil, was especially execrated by the people. In advices from home, received by the French Ambassador in Venice, it is said that "more than seven weeks ago, a mob of from seven to eight thousand women of London went out of the town to seize Boleyn's daughter, who was supping at a pleasure-house on the river, the King not being with her; and having received notice of this, she escaped by crossing the river in a boat. The women had intended to kill her; and amongst the mob were many men disguised as women; nor has any great stir been made about this affair, because it was a thing done by women."¹ As to the character and appearance of Anne, accounts vary. Coresara² described her, in 1528, as of surpassing beauty, but an anonymous writer, who saw her on the occasion of her visit with Henry to the French Court as bride-elect, reports that "Madam Anne is not one of the handsomest women in the world; she is of middling stature, and has a swarthy complexion, long neck, wide mouth, and undeveloped bosom. In fact, she has nothing to boast of except the King's infatuation and her eyes, which are black and beautiful, and have done some execution among certain of the late Queen's attendants."³ The last sentence is thought by Mr. Rawdon Brown to refer to Brereton, Norris, and Weston, afterwards accused of being her paramours. A certain diplomatic aptitude on Anne's part is revealed in an account of an audience with the Venetian Ambassador, during which she informed him that "she knew that God had inspired his Majesty to marry her, and that he could have found a greater personage than herself, but not one more anxious and ready to demonstrate her love towards the Signory."⁴ This may or may not have been so; but in another despatch we find Falieri describing her uncle, the Duke of Norfolk, as "a small man with black hair, who bore special illwill to our Venetian nation."

The resultant of Mr. Froude's ingenuity—the real thesis of his book—is an attempt to prove that the divorce was a mere matter of public policy, and that Henry did not fall in

¹ Sanuto Diaries, 24 November, 1531.

² Coresara to the Signory of Venice, 10 February, 1528.

³ Sanuto Diaries, 31 October, 1532.

⁴ Capello to the Signory of Venice, 24 June, 1533.

love with Anne Boleyn until long after it had been projected. "There was no trace at the outset," he says deliberately, "of an attachment to another woman;" he states that in 1526 Henry had for two years ceased to cohabit with his wife as she had "certain diseases which made it impossible that she could be again pregnant," and that, as no woman can sit upon the throne of England, his death without a male heir would plunge the country into civil war. In the matter of dates, Mr. Froude is not corroborated by the Italian archives. It is true that from an early day, Henry had been systematically unfaithful to the Queen, and that the idea of a divorce had presented itself to his mind whenever he was under the thrall of a new favourite. In 1513, after only four years of marriage, he had put the Court into mourning for the death of one of his mistresses;¹ and in 1520 he had again affronted his wife by conferring an earldom upon his natural son, and threatening to make him heir to the crown. As early as 1514, rumours were afloat that he intended to repudiate Catherine, "because he was unable to have children by her."² But the project did not take definite shape until his intrigues with Anne were well advanced; and it is only in October, 1529, that the Venetian Ambassador reports the Queen to have been "divorced from the King's bed,"³ that is to say, fully three years after Henry had, by Mr. Froude's own admission, "fallen under the fascination of the impatient Anne."⁴ In fact, the allegations of conscience and high policy appear all through to have been merely cloaks to conceal the King's weakness in the hands of his courtesans. Subsequent history has shown that the nation will "submit to a female sovereign;"⁵ and Henry's conscience, which could not brook the "mortal sin" of cleaving to his good and faithful Queen, afterwards proved sufficiently elastic to enable him to advocate an incestuous marriage between his daughter and his illegitimate son.

Mr. Froude is very impatient with Queen Catherine for not giving way in this great contest, and, by the sacrifice

¹ Sanuto Diaries, v., xvii., p. 287.

² Letter of Vettor Lippomano, 28 August, 1514.

³ Sebastian Giustinian to the Signory of Venice.

⁴ See Froude, p. 182.

⁵ See Froude, p. 22.

of herself, allaying the turmoil of Europe; and she was of so long-suffering and unselfish a character that she would doubtless have done so if her own rights alone had been concerned. But he seems to forget that to acquiesce in the invalidity of her marriage would have been to bastardize her beloved daughter, and destroy her claims to the succession. Henry had at first made much of the Princess. When the Venetian Ambassador congratulated him on her birth, he exclaimed, "My wife and I are both young, and, if it has been a daughter this time, by the grace of God, sons will follow."¹ The attention and indulgence which Mary received at the age of two aroused general astonishment. Giustinian thus describes her appearance on a state occasion: "The Cardinal, the Lords and I kissed her hand, for that alone is kissed by any duke or noble of the land, let his degree be what it may, nor does any one see her without doffing his bonnet, and making obeisance to her. The King said to me, '*Domine Orator, per Deum immortalem, ista puella nunquam plorat*'; and I replied, 'Sacred Majesty, the reason is that her destiny does not move her to tears; she will even become Queen of France.' These words pleased the king vastly. On seeing the Reverend Dionysius Memo, the King's organist, the Princess commenced calling out in English: 'Priest!' and he was obliged to go and play with her."² When the divorce was in progress, she was treated with neglect and harshness by her father. Capello mentions in 1532 that the King had not seen her for more than a year,³ and for a long time she was virtually a prisoner. In fact her cause was bound up with that of her mother, as were those of the Roman Catholic Church, ecclesiastical endowments, and the sanctity of the marriage tie. It was for her, and for them, that Catherine of Aragon remained steadfast and undaunted in the hour of persecution.

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¹ Sebastian Giustinian to the Signory of Venice, 24 February, 1516.

² *Ibid.*, 28 February, 1518, and 10 September, 1519.

³ Carlo Capello to the Signory of Venice, 18 September, 1532.