

CHAPTER XX.

Cromwell vicegerent.—Visitation of the Monasteries.—Delinquencies of monastic inmates, in some cases.—Official corruption.—Examples of duty performed by male and female heads of houses.—Dissolution of the smaller monasteries.—Parliamentary attempts to regulate prices and the quality of manufactures.—Such endeavours futile or injurious.—Death of Queen Catherine.—May-day at Greenwich.—Previous summoning of a special Commission.—Arrests.—Queen Anne imprisoned in the Tower.—Her deportment.—Her letter to the King.—Cranmer's letters to him.—True bills found against Anne, her brother, and four others.—Trial of the four commoners.—Trial of Anne Boleyn and Lord Rochfort.—Execution of the five men pronounced guilty.—Account of the execution of Anne by an eye-witness.—Marriage of Henry to Jane Seymour.—General remarks on the question of Anne Boleyn's guilt or innocence.—Parliament and a new law of succession.—The Princess Mary.

THOMAS CROMWELL has not suffered the grass to grow under his feet since he went to the king, in 1529, to "make or mar it." During seven years of momentous change, from the position of the servant of a fallen master—very likely himself to be hanged, as some men said—he had been raised through a succession of offices—master of the jewels, chancellor of the exchequer, secretary of state—to wield the most potent ecclesiastical authority as the king's vicegerent. The archbishops and bishops may direct the consciences of the clergy. Cromwell will look after their revenues. It has been truly observed that "Cromwell, after the fall of his master, Wolsey, gained on the affections of Henry VIII. till he acquired as great an ascendancy, and nearly as much power, as the cardinal had possessed during the preceding part of the reign; and, whatever office he happened to hold, he was looked up to as the mover of the entire machine of the state." This observation is founded upon the whole tone of official correspondence from 1531 to 1540, when this powerful minister fell from his slippery elevation.*

In that department of the British Museum called "the Cottonian Library,"—a most valuable collection of MSS. made by Sir Robert Cotton early in the seventeenth century—there is a volume of letters and documents which furnish the most minute

* Introduction to State Papers, vol. i. part ii.

information as to the Visitation of the Monasteries,—the measure which preceded their dissolution. In the Chapter-house at Westminster were formerly many bundles of documents known as the Cromwell Papers; * from which the volume in the British Museum was probably a selection. At various times some of these most curious papers had been published. They exhibit, not only the means of forming a correct estimate of many of the real bearings of the great ecclesiastical revolution, but furnish many incidental views of a condition of society which was soon to be swept away, and leave no traces but ruined walls and sculptured columns, where the ivy creeps and the bat hides. The first Statute for the dissolution of the smaller monasteries, which immediately follows the visitation of 1535-6, says, of "the smaller abbeys, priories, and other religious houses of monks, canons, and nuns," that "many continual visitations have been heretofore had, by the space of two hundred years and more." † Wolsey, as we have seen, suppressed some of these houses; and his servant Cromwell had experience of the mode of conducting such operations. But Wolsey applied their revenues to noble uses. How Cromwell applied them we feel to this hour—every time that a church is to be built, or a school founded, by voluntary aid.

In the height of summer in 1535, three learned doctors set forth upon excursions into various parts of England, each having in his pocket a commission from the "vicegerent of the king in all his ecclesiastical jurisdiction within the realm." Dr. Layton is a most amusing correspondent of the vicegerent; and many a hearty laugh must there have been between the minister and "sundry divers fresh and quick wits, pertaining to his family; by whose industry and ingenious labours divers excellent ballads and books were contrived and set abroad concerning the suppression of the pope and all popish idolatry." ‡ Dr. Layton has capital stories to tell of the prior of Maiden Bradley, in Wilts, about his relics; and of his less ancient realities, namely six children, of whom his sons "be tall men waiting upon him." § The worthy commissioner sent some of the curiosities to Cromwell, such as "Mary Magdalene's girdle." Articles of more intrinsic value were in his keeping: "I have crosses of silver and gold, some which I send you not

* These are now in the Record Office, and the State Paper Office.

† 27 Hen. VIII. c. 28.

‡ Fox, "Martyrs," quoted in Dr. Maitland's "Essays on the Reformation," p. 237.

§ "Suppression of the Monasteries," p. 68.

now, because I have more than shall be delivered me this night by the prior of Maiden Bradley himself." The visitors anticipated that clause of the Act for the Suppression, which gave the king "all the ornaments, jewels, goods, and chattels" of the heads of the monastic houses, from the 1st of March, 1535. This was a large power to be entrusted to the visitors, and they never neglected to exercise it. They had rougher work to perform, which Dr. Layton, at any rate, appears to have set about with hearty goodwill, however odious that work may seem to our more fastidious notions of the office of a gentleman. At Langdon, in Kent, was a small abbey, founded in 1192. It had several doors besides the front gate—"starting-holes" as the commissioner calls them. Dr. Layton comes suddenly upon Langdon, with his retinue; and descending from his horse orders his servants "surely to keep all back-doors and starting-holes." The abbot's lodging joined upon the fields and wood; and there the commissioner knocked and knocked, but heard nothing, "saving the abbot's little dog that, within his door fast locked, bayed and barked." The valiant doctor of law seized a pole-axe, and dashed the abbot's door in pieces; "and about house I go with the pole-axe in my hand, for the abbot is a dangerous desperate knave, and a hardy." Out of one of the starting-holes "rushed a tender demoiselle," who was conveyed to prison at Dover; "and I brought holy father abbot to Canterbury, and here in Christchurch I will leave him in prison."* There are too many such stories in these letters. But we have one painful feeling in reading them—even more painful than the exposure of hypocrisy and licentiousness—the tone in which these matters are spoken of. We heartily agree in the opinion of one who, in common with all earnest men, hates scoffers:—"One would think that the sight of such an abomination of desolation as they professed to see, must have filled all who had anything like the love of God in their hearts, or even the fear of God before their eyes, with grief and consternation." †

Dr. Layton and Dr. Legh have gone together to Fountains Abbey. They write that the abbot is defamed by the whole people for his profligate life, and for his dilapidation of the house and wasting of the woods. Before the commissioners came he possessed himself of a jewel, and a cross of gold; and sold them, with plate of the house, to a goldsmith of Cheap. The commissioners properly compelled the abbot to resign. He joined the Yorkshire

* "Suppression of the Monasteries," p. 75

† Maitland, p. 225.

insurrection in 1536, and was hanged. A writer who derives this relation from the same source as ourselves, says that "tourists, who in their day-dreams among these fair ruins are inclined to complain of the sacrilege which wasted the houses of prayer," may study with advantage the account of the "moral ruin," of which "the outward beautiful ruin was but a symbol and a consequence."* May we not add that the historian, who presents this account of the low morality of the ancient clergy, might have also given us the following glimpse of the noble aims of the new statesmen? To Cromwell, the learned commissioners wrote, in the same letter which describes the frauds of the abbot, these significant words:—"There is a monk of the house, called Marmaduke, to whom Mr. Timms left a prebend in Ripon church, now abiding upon the same prebend, the wisest monk within England of that coat, and well learned—twenty years officer and ruler of all that house,—a wealthy fellow, which will give you six hundred marks to make him abbot there, and pay you immediately after the election." † That this mode of propitiating favour was perfectly understood before the final destruction of the monastic houses was resolved upon, may be inferred from a letter of Latimer, of all men; who does not hesitate to write to Cromwell to avert the suppression of the priory of Great Malvern, by saying, "If five hundred marks to the king's highness, with two hundred marks to yourself for your good will, might occasion the promotion of his intent, at least way for the time of his life, he doubteth not to make his friends for the same." ‡

But, however Latimer, in common with other honest men, might have compromised with the political corruption of the time, he appears at this stage of the Reformation, and indeed at a later period not to have thought that an unmixed good was to be attained by the total annihilation of the religious houses. Pleading for this prior of Great Malvern, he says, "He would be an humble suitor to your lordship, and by the same to the king's good grace, for the upstanding of his foresaid house, and continuance of the same to many good purposes; not in monkery, he meaneth not so, God forbid; but any other ways as should be thought and seem good to the king's majesty, as to maintain teaching, preaching, study with praying, and, to the which he is much given, good housekeeping, for to the virtue of hospitality he hath been greatly inclined from his beginning." § In a sermon before Edward VI. Latimer says, "Abbeys

* Froide, vol. ii. p. 423.

† "Suppression of the Monasteries," p. 101.

‡ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

§ *Ibid.*

were ordained for the comfort of the poor." * That the monastic establishments might have been retained, or their revenues applied, for purposes of Christian education, was the opinion of the more conscientious reformers. That retreats for females, set apart from the world to do offices of piety and charity, would be institutions compatible with the most enlarged freedom of religious opinion, is not disproved by any allegations of the laxity of some nunneries, when thousands of helpless beings were turned forth, under vows of chastity, into a world for the struggles of which they were so unfitted. The abbot of Faversham, who had been in his office from the time of Henry VII., was threatened with removal on account of his advanced age. The old man had some ideas of what his duties were, when he wrote, "If the chief office and profession of an abbot be, as I have ever taken it, to live chaste and solitarily, to be separate from the intromedding of worldly things, to serve God quietly, to distribute his faculties in refreshing of poor indigent persons, to have a vigilant eye to the good order and rule of his house and the flock to him committed in God, I trust, your favour and benevolence obtained (whereof I right humbly require you), I myself may and am as well able yet now to supply and continue these parts as ever I was in all my life." † Let us not, in charity, believe that all these men were of lying tongues and evil lives. Let us not imagine that all nuns were sensual and ignorant. The very commissioners themselves speak of many nunneries as above all suspicion. The prioress of Catesby is represented as a wise, discreet, and very religious woman; her nuns devout and of good obedience. "The said house standeth in such a quarter, much to the relief of the king's people, and his grace's poor subjects there likewise more relieved." ‡

If we may form an opinion from the preamble of the statute of 1536, by which religious houses not above the yearly value of two hundred pounds were given to the king, the framers of the act, and the parliament which assented to it, intended the suppression of the monasteries there to stop. The statute proposes that the members of the smaller houses shall be removed to "divers great and solemn monasteries of this realm, wherein, thanks be to God, religion is right well kept and observed." This was deliberately asserted, after the visitation had been proceeding for more than

* First Sermon before Edward VI.

‡ Ellis, First Series, vol. ii. p. 72.

† "Suppression," &c, p. 104.

six months. The statute of 1539, simply entitled, "An Act for dissolution of Abbeys," swept the whole monastic system away, without assigning any reason beyond the flagrant untruth, that the abbots, abbesses, and other governors of the houses, "of their own free and voluntary minds, goodwills, and assents, without constraint, coaction, or compulsion," had since the 4th of February, 1536, assigned their possessions to the king, and renounced all title to the same. We merely notice this final act of confiscation here; and pass on to the general course of our narrative.

The act for the dissolution of the smaller religious houses was passed in March. The parliament was dissolved on the 4th of April. It had existed for seven years, during which it had assisted in some of the greatest changes of internal policy which England had ever witnessed. It had laboured, too, as previous parliaments had laboured, in devising remedies for social evils, after the prescriptive fashion of believing that laws could regulate prices, and that industry was to be benefited by enacting how manufacturers should tan leather or dye cloth, and what trades should be carried on in particular towns. It is held to be evidence of the calmness with which the statesmen of this parliament proceeded in their great work of ecclesiastical reform, that they passed "acts to protect the public against the frauds of money-making tradesmen; to provide that shoes and boots should be made of honest leather; that food should be sold at fair prices; that merchants should part with their goods at fair profits." Such battles against "those besetting basenesses of human nature, now held to be so invincible that the influences of them are assumed as the fundamental axioms of economic science," are declared to be more glorious "than even the English constitution or the English liturgy." * Without looking further than the records of this parliament, we may venture to suggest that these victories had no permanent influence in making any product cheaper or better, but were the greatest obstacles to improvement, and therefore prevented a wider diffusion of things convenient for man. Was the manufacture of cloth likely to be improved, when the various dyeing woods that were brought to Europe after the discovery of America—"Brazil, and such other like subtleties"—were forbidden to be used? † Could the yeoman and the labourer obtain a better or a cheaper coat, when graziers and husbandmen were prohibited from weaving, fulling, or shearing

* Froude, "History," vol. i. p. 405.

† 24 Hen. VIII. c. 2.

cloth in their houses? * The statutes for regulating the prices of land confess the utter fruitlessness of such enactments: "Forasmuch as dearth, scarcity, good cheap and plenty of cheese, butter, capons, hens, chickens, and other victuals necessary of man's sustenance, happeneth, riseth, and chanceth of so many and divers occasions, that it is very hard and difficult to put any certain prices to any such things,"—yet, upon any complaint of the enhancing of prices "without reasonable cause," proclamation shall be made at what rate they shall be sold. † One more glimpse at these notable expedients "to compel all classes of persons to be true men" in spite of "the fundamental axioms of economic science." The regulating parliament decrees that flesh is to be sold by weight; that beef and pork are to be sold at a halfpenny a pound; and mutton and veal at three farthings. ‡ But there are some others to be consulted in this matter besides the butchers. What if the graziers will not sell fat cattle to the butchers at a proportionate rate? The next session an act is passed to compel them. § But one inevitable consequence ensues—it is not remunerative to the graziers to breed and fatten cattle; so in two years more a scarcity ensues, the direct result of the legislation. And then, "the king's highness, well considering the great dearth of all manner of victuals which be now, and since the making of the said statutes," suspends their operations for four years, and leaves graziers and butchers to settle the prices of meat "without pain, imprisonment, forfeiture, or penalty." ||

In the last days of December, 1535, "the Lady Dowager" lies on her death-bed at Kimbolton. Her physician "moved her to take more counsel of physic: whereunto she answered she would in no wise have any other physician, but only commit herself to the pleasure of God." ¶ In her last hours she wrote a brief letter to Henry; chiefly to commend her daughter and her maids to his respect. Its opening sentence was one of solemn warning: "The hour of my death now approaching, I cannot choose but, out of the love I bear you, advise you of your soul's health, which you ought to prefer before all considerations of the world or flesh whatsoever; for which yet you have cast me into many calamities, and yourself into many troubles. But I forgive you all, and pray God to do so likewise." The world and the flesh were to bring that

* 25 Hen. VIII. c. 18.

† *Ibid.*, c. 2.

‡ 24 Hen. VIII. c. 3.

§ 25 Hen. VIII. c. 1.

|| 27 Hen. VIII. c. 9.

¶ Bedyngfield to Cromwell, December 31. State Papers, vol. i. p. 451.

man into other troubles, and produce even more terrible calamities. Catherine died on the 7th of January, 1536.

In the February following, Anne Boleyn had a premature delivery of a dead son. There was again disappointment to the king. His desire for an heir had become a passion,—more dangerous in mingling with his inconstancy and caprice, and his sensual estimate of the female character. There is a beautiful passage in the "Memoir of Anne Boleyn," by George Wyatt, written at the close of the 16th century, but unpublished till our own times, in which, speaking of this February of 1536, he says of the queen: "Being thus a woman full of sorrow, it was reported that the king came to her, and bewailing and complaining unto her of the loss of his boy, some words were heard break out of the inward feeling of her heart's dolours, laying the fault upon unkindness." He adds, "Wise men in those days judged that her virtues were here her defaults; and that if her too much love could as well as the other queen have borne with his defect of love, she might have fallen into less danger." Catherine bore her fate patiently, as long as she was queen. Anne could not bear to hold the dignity as a neglected wife. However justly we may blame the weakness of Anne in permitting the royal lover to be for years at her feet, while the question of the divorce was depending, we see, after the marriage, a frank and affectionate helpmate,—cheerful, gay—"the lark is gay, the innocent are gay,"—kind to her dependents; earnest in looking at the Scriptures as the rule of life; of unbounded charity. "She had distributed, in the last nine months of her life, between fourteen and fifteen thousand pounds to the poor." * But she had bitter enemies. She was regarded as a heretic; and no suspicion could more ensure her the king's hatred than this;—nor the hatred of her uncle, the duke of Norfolk. The moment that it was perceived that the king was cooling upon his "most entirely beloved wife," as he had so often proclaimed her to be, there were agents ready to procure her ruin. A poet—and poets sometimes see as clearly as historians into the secret passages of the past—has connected the fall of Anne Boleyn with the machinations which were prompted by "that awful spirit of fanaticism—the more awful, because strictly conscientious—which was arrayed against our early Reformers." † The Society of which Loyola was the founder was not regularly organised till 1540; but

* Burnet, book iii.

† Milman, Introduction to "Anne Boleyn; a Dramatic Poem."

his most energetic proselytes were earlier in full activity. With such secret agents about Henry, to hint that the want of an heir was an intimation of heaven's displeasure at his second marriage, as of the first; with Gardiner abroad, to suggest that the emperor would never acknowledge the lawfulness of the issue of queen Anne; with one in the court, young and fair, with whom the king had evidently a perfect understanding; and with Anne herself, having habitually an unconstrained demeanour to those about her, which might be construed into levity and even guilt,—there could be no great difficulty in setting “the sordid slave” Audley, and “the base and profligate” Rich—(we use Lord Campbell's designations of these men)—to manufacture evidence, and to ground indictments for treason upon a statute that admitted of no such construction. There were secret investigations going on in April. Henry, according to his rule and habit, was smiling upon his victim while the axe was sharpening. He had long practised the art of hiding his thoughts under the mask of familiarity and kindness. “Three may keep counsel,” he said to Cavendish, “if two be away; and if I thought that my cap knew my counsel, I would cast it into the fire and burn it.”* And so, after a special commission was ordered to assemble, notice having been issued on the 24th of April, the usual festivities took place at Greenwich on the 1st of May; and Henry sate by the side of Anne as they gazed upon the tournament. In the lists was her brother, lord Rochfort—one of that band of courtly poets who engrafted the smoothness of Italian verse upon our rougher English—the contemporary of Surrey and Wyatt—the accomplished scholar—the courtier of “admirable discourse.” He was soon to say, as in a poem attributed to him, “My lute be still, for I have done.”† At that tournament lord Rochfort was the challenger of sir Henry Norris. To the real incidents of that day, which we may sufficiently trace from authentic relations, report added that Anne dropped a handkerchief which Norris picked up, and that Henry's jealousy was thus stung into madness. Hall, who in his Chronicle is excessively brief in his relations of these events, says, “On May-day were a solemn justs kept at Greenwich; and suddenly from the justs the king departed, having not above six persons with him, and came in the evening from Greenwich in his place at Westminster. Of this sudden departing many men mused, but most chiefly the queen.” One who

* “Life of Wolsey,” p. 399.

† See Warton's “English Poetry,” Park's edit., vol. iii. p. 316.

was a servant of sir Henry Norris has given us a glimpse of what passed in this hasty ride to London of the king and his six attendants. “Upon May-day, Mr. Norris justed; and, after justing, the king rode suddenly to Westminster; and all the way, as I heard say, had Mr. Norris in examination, and promised him his pardon in case he would utter the truth. But what soever could be said or done, Mr. Norris would confess nothing to the king; whereupon he was committed to the Tower in the morning.”* Of Anne's position and behaviour on that night of doubt and fear when the king left her at Greenwich, we hear nothing. From Tuesday, the 2nd of May to the day of her death on Friday the 19th, the record is very clear of the mode in which she bore her inflictions. The letters of the constable of the Tower, sir William Kingston, tell the unhappy story very fully.†

It appears that the queen was examined by some of the council at Greenwich. “I was cruelly handled at Greenwich,” she says to Kingston, “with the king's council, with my lord of Norfolk: he said, ‘tut, tut, tut,’ and shaking his head three or four times.” They accompanied her to the Tower, on the 2nd, and on their departing, says Kingston, “I went before the queen into her lodging; and then she said unto me, ‘Mr. Kingston, shall I go into a dungeon?’ ‘No, madam; you shall go into your lodging that you lay in at your coronation.’ ‘It is too good for me,’ she said, ‘Jesu, have mercy on me;’ and kneeled down weeping a great pace, and in the same sorrow fell to a great laughing, and she hath done so many times since.” She desired to have the sacrament in her chamber, that she might pray for mercy; “for I am as clear from the company of men, as for sin, as I am clear from you, and am the king's true wedded wife.” She pressed Kingston to know where lord Rochfort was—“O, where is my sweet brother?” She exclaimed, “O Norris, hast thou accused me; thou art in the Tower with me, and thou and I shall die together: and, Mark, art thou here too?” The cruel handling of the council was upon her mind Mark was the musician—his name Smeaton. The memorial of Constantine thus speaks of him: “I cannot tell how he was examined; but upon May-day in the morning he was in the Tower. The truth is, he confessed it: but yet the saying was that he was

* From a memorial to Cromwell, by George Constantine, giving an account of a conversation which he held in Pembrokeshire. “Archæologia,” vol. xxiii.

† These letters were much injured by fire in the Cotton Library in 1731. Strype had printed many passages entire, copied before the fire. We give the extracts as they stand in Mr. Singer's edition of Cavendish.

first grievously racked." According to Kingston, the queen kept harping upon Norris, and speaking of him as if he had made advances to her, for which she had reproved him, and said she could undo him if she would. She had been persuaded that Norris had spoken lightly of her, but Norris had said to her almoner that he would swear she was a good woman. This talk does not appear to have chiefly taken place before the constable of the Tower, but was reported to him by one Mistress Cosyn, who was appointed to lie with the queen on her pallet,—lady Boleyn, her uncle's wife and her domestic enemy, being also there. Out of such talk it would be easy to prepare solemn depositions; and Kingston, with the true wisdom of the gaoler-spy, says, "I have everything told me by Mistress Cosyn that she thinks meet for me to know." The queen spake, too, of Weston (sir Francis Weston), who had said that he loved her; and in telling this, "she defied him." From time to time her mind is dwelling upon the threats and insinuations of Norfolk and the king's council, as these treacherous women question her; and she wanders in her distracted talk from one to the other of those who had been mentioned as being implicated in her dishonour. There is nothing which indicates anything more than the affection which these men naturally bore to a kind and perhaps too condescending mistress, in any one of her rambling and indiscreet sentences. It would be difficult to extract a proof of guilt, or even of levity, from this her account of the poor musician, Mark. At Winchester he came to her lodging to play upon the virginals: "I never spake with him since, but upon Saturday before May-day, and then I found him standing in the round window in my chamber of presence; and I asked why he was so sad, and he answered and said it was no matter; and then she said, 'You may not look to have me speak to you as I should to a noble man, because you be an inferior person.' 'No, no, madam, a look sufficed me.'"

When the queen first came into the Tower, she said, "Mr. Kingston, shall I die without justice?" and he answered "the poorest subject the king hath has justice;" and therewith she laughed. It was the laugh of despair. Yet she made an effort to touch the heart of the king; and she said to Kingston, "I shall desire you to bear a letter from me to Master Secretary." A copy of a letter to the king, with the words written upon it, "From the Lady in the Tower," is to be seen amongst the Cotton MSS. in the British Museum. The handwriting is supposed to be of the

latter time of Henry VIII. It has been much injured by fire; but the entire letter, with which this burnt MS. corresponds in the parts untouched, is printed in Lord Herbert's history, and by Burnet, who refers to the MS. in a marginal note. We make no apology for printing this beautiful composition at length; whose authenticity sir James Mackintosh and sir Henry Ellis concur in believing, as well as Mr. Froude, who has no belief in Anne Boleyn's innocence:—

"Sir,—Your grace's displeasure, and my imprisonment, are things so strange unto me, as what to write, or what to excuse, I am altogether ignorant. Whereas you send unto me (willing me to confess a truth, and so obtain your favour) by such an one whom you know to be mine ancient professed enemy, I no sooner received this message by him, than I rightly conceived your meaning; and if, as you say, confessing a truth indeed may procure my safety, I shall with all willingness and duty perform your command.

"But let not your grace ever imagine that your poor wife will ever be brought to acknowledge a fault, where not so much as a thought thereof preceded. And, to speak a truth, never prince had wife more loyal in all duty, and in all true affection, than you have ever found in Anne Boleyn, with which name and place I could willingly have contended myself, if God and your grace's pleasure had been so pleased. Neither did I at any time so far forget myself in my exaltation, or received queenship, but that I always looked for such an alteration as now I find; for, the ground of my preferment being on no surer foundation than your grace's fancy, the least alteration was fit and sufficient, I knew, to draw that fancy to some other subject. You have chosen me, from a low estate, to be your queen and companion, far beyond my desert or desire. If then you found me worthy of such honour, good your grace let not any light fancy, or bad counsel of mine enemies, withdraw your princely favour from me; neither let that stain, that unworthy stain of a disloyal heart towards your good grace, ever cast so foul a blot on your most dutiful wife, and the infant princess your daughter. Try me, good king; but let me have a lawful trial, and let not my sworn enemies sit as my accusers and judges: yea, let me receive an open trial, for my truth shall fear no open shame. Then shall you see, either mine innocency cleared, your suspicion and conscience satisfied, the ignominy and slander of the world stopped, or my guilt openly declared. So that, whatso-

ever God or you may determine of, your grace may be free from an open censure; and mine offence being so lawfully proved, your grace is at liberty, both before God and man, not only to execute worthy punishment on me as an unfaithful wife, but to follow your affection already settled on that party, for whose sake I am now as I am, whose name I could some good while since have pointed unto: your grace being not ignorant of my suspicion therein.

"But, if you have already determined of me, and that not only my death, but an infamous slander must bring you the enjoying of your desired happiness; then I desire of God, that he will pardon your great sin therein, and likewise my enemies, the instruments thereof; and that he will not call you to a strait account for your unprincely and cruel usage of me, at his great judgment seat, where both you and myself must shortly appear, and in whose just judgment, I doubt not, whatsoever the world may think of me, mine innocence shall be openly known, and sufficiently cleared.

"My last and only request shall be, that myself may only bear the burthen of your grace's displeasure, and that it may not touch the innocent souls of those poor gentlemen who, as I understand, are likewise in strait imprisonment for my sake. If I ever have found favour in your sight; if ever the name of Anne Boleyn hath been pleasing in your ears, then let me obtain this request; and so I will leave to trouble your grace any further, with mine earnest prayers to the Trinity to have your grace in his good keeping, and to direct you in all your actions. From my doleful prison in the Tower, this sixth of May.

"Your most loyal and ever faithful wife,

"ANNE BOLEYN."*

The day after Anne had been imprisoned in the Tower, Cranmer wrote a remarkable letter to the king.† He commences by saying that he had been commanded by Mr. Secretary, in the king's name, to repair to Lambeth, and there to wait his pleasure. Out of kindness or policy his aid in the inquiries of the council was thus forbidden. He then adverts to the common rumour, and to the consequent "deep sorrows of your grace's heart," and thus pro-

* The force and elegance of the diction have led some to believe that this letter was beyond the ability of Anne. Its modern form has, perhaps, been injurious to a conviction of its authenticity; and therefore we append it as a note, as the MS. now exhibits it, with the mutilated part in italics. (See end of this chapter.)

† This letter is printed by Burnet (book iii.), who says he copied it from the original.

ceeds:—"I cannot deny but your grace hath great causes many ways of lamentable heaviness; and also that in the wrongful estimation of the world your grace's honour of every part is so highly touched (whether the things that commonly be spoken of be true or not), that I remember not that ever Almighty God sent your grace any like occasion to try your grace's constancy throughout, whether your highness can be content to take of God's hand as well things displeasing as pleasant." He then proceeds to exhort the king to imitate the example of Job, in his "willing acceptance of God's scourge and rod." After this introduction he summons courage to come to the point upon which it required all his discretion to speak:—"And if it be true that is openly reported of the queen's grace, if men had a right estimation of things they should not esteem any part of your grace's honour to be touched thereby, but her honour only to be clearly disparaged. And I am in such a perplexity that my mind is clean amazed. For I never had better opinion in woman than I had in her, which maketh me to think, that she should not be culpable. And again, I think your highness would not have gone so far, except she had surely been culpable. Now I think that your grace best knoweth, that next unto your grace I was most bound unto her of all creatures living. Wherefore I most humbly beseech your grace to suffer me in that which both God's law, nature, and also her kindness bindeth me unto, that is, that I may with your grace's favour wish and pray for her, that she may declare herself inculpable and innocent. And if she be found culpable, considering your grace's goodness towards her, and from what condition your grace of your only mere goodness took her, and set the crown upon her head, I repute him not your grace's faithful servant and subject, nor true unto the realm, that would not desire the offence without mercy to be punished, to the example of all other. And as I loved her not a little, for the love which I judged her to bear towards God and his gospel; so if she be proved culpable, there is not one that loveth God and his gospel that ever will favour her, but must hate her above all other; and the more they favour the gospel, the more they will hate her. For then there was never creature in our time that so much slandereth the gospel. And God hath sent her this punishment, for that she feignedly hath professed his gospel in her mouth, and not in heart and deed." What follows very clearly indicates the inclination of Anne to a true reform of religion, founded upon the knowledge of the Scriptures; and the influence which she had ex-

exercised upon Henry's opinions. But it also shows how wavering Cranmer thought the mind of that man who bore a two-edged sword, to punish those who clung to the papal power and those who sought any expansion of spiritual belief. "I trust that your grace will bear no less entire favour unto the truth of the gospel than you did before: forasmuch as your grace's favour to the gospel was not led by affection unto her, but by zeal unto the truth." Then comes this significant postscript:—

"After I had written this letter unto your grace, my lord chancellor, my lord of Oxford, my lord of Sussex, and my lord chamberlain of your grace's house, sent for me to come unto the Star Chamber; and there declared unto me such things as your grace's pleasure was they should make me privy unto. For the which I am most bounden unto your grace. And what communication we had together, I doubt not but they will make the true report thereof unto your grace. I am exceedingly sorry, that such faults can be proved by the queen, as I heard of their relation. But I am, and ever shall be, your faithful subject." When Cranmer knew nothing of the charges against the queen, he used very strong language,— "offence without mercy to be punished"—"God hath sent her this punishment." When the lord chancellor, and others, have made him privy to such things as the king desired him to know, he is only "exceedingly sorry that such faults can be proved by [of] the queen as I heard of their relation." If he had heard enough to justify a charge "without mercy to be punished," would he not have used even stronger language than in the first portion of his letter? The charges against the queen were so awful, as set forth upon her so-called trial, that he must have suppressed that letter which said, "I never had better opinion in woman than I had in her, which maketh me to think that she should not be culpable."

On the 10th and 11th of November true bills were found by grand-juries of Middlesex and of Kent, against the queen, her brother, Henry Norris, William Brereton, Francis Weston, and Mark Smeaton, setting forth that the queen had incited them, including lord Rochfort, to commit the most odious crimes; that they had at various times compassed and imagined the king's death; and that the king, "having within a short time before become acquainted with the before-mentioned crimes, vices, and treasons, had been so grieved that certain harms and dangers had happened to his royal body." The grand-juries that found that the disease which was incident to the king's gross habit, and of which he died

—ulceration of the legs—was produced by grief—a grief so short-lived as to permit him to marry again within nine days of this finding—were not likely to be very scrupulous upon returning true bills to any indictment presented to them. On the 12th of May, the four commoners were tried by a jury at Westminster. They were convicted, and were executed on the 17th. These four men did not confess upon the scaffold to the crimes with which they were accused. As men about to die they confessed their sins generally. According to the letter by a bystander, "who heard them, and wrote every word they spake,"* Norris said that he deserved to die, "but the cause wherefore I die judge not, but if ye judge, judge the best."† Of the other three he says that they "in a manner" confessed all. But when he comes to particulars the "all" evaporates in general admissions of a sinful life. A Portuguese, who has given a most minute account of these executions, says, of the four commoners, "they besought the bystanders to pray for them, and that they yielded themselves to death with joy and exceeding gladness."‡

The last scene of this dismal tragedy quickly opens. On the 13th of May a select number of peers assembled in the Tower—twenty-seven in all. The duke of Norfolk presided. The queen was arraigned; and pleaded not guilty. There is no record of the trial; no tittle of the evidence is preserved. The verdict was "Guilty;" the judgment, "to be beheaded or burned at the king's pleasure." The same form was gone through with lord Rochfort; with the usual sentence of death for treason. Lawyers are perplexed now to know under what statute any one of those accused could have been found guilty of treason. The evidence was not open to the world, for the proceeding "was enclosed in strong walls."‡ A Flemish gentleman, in London at the time, complains of the absence of witnesses upon these trials. Then, and long after, in trials for high treason witnesses were not confronted with the prisoners; and it was held sufficient to read out their depositions. We can thus, easily understand how, on such a state-trial, to be accused was necessarily to be condemned. On the morning of her execution, Anne Boleyn requested Kingston to be present while she received the sacrament, and then declared her "innocency." She

* Constantine's letter to Cromwell, in "Archæologia."

† Letter written from London on the 10th of June, from a Portuguese gentleman to a friend in Lisbon, translated by Lord Strangford. "Excerpta Historica," p. 260.

‡ Wyatt.

had been brought before Cranmer, before her trial, to be examined upon some mysterious point which enabled him to pronounce a sentence of divorce. Burnet says it was in consequence of a pre-contract with the earl of Northumberland. This the earl denied upon oath. When she died for alleged adultery, she was by law proclaimed not to have been the king's wife at all.

Lord Rochfort was executed with the four commoners on the 17th of May. On the 19th, Anne was brought out to die on the Tower-green. Kingston thus wrote of his last interview with her within the prison-walls: "She sent for me, and at my coming, she said, 'Mr. Kingston, I hear say I shall not die afore noon, and I am very sorry therefore; for I thought then to be dead and past my pain.' I told her it should be no pain, it was so subtle. And then she said, 'I heard say the executioner was very good, and I have a little neck,' and put her hand about it, laughing heartily. I have seen many men and also women executed, and they have been in great sorrow; and to my knowledge this lady hath much joy and pleasure in death."

The Portuguese sojourner in London has left the most detailed account of this deed, which startled Europe as much as the cruel end of Fisher and More. Anne was beheaded with a sword, "which thing had not before been seen in this land of England." She was habited in a robe of black damask. The speech which the foreigner assigns to her differs in no essentials from that given by Stow, but is somewhat fuller; and is not open to the suspicion of being curtailed by the English chroniclers of the time: "Good friends, I am not come here to excuse or to justify myself, forasmuch as I know full well that aught that I could say in my defence doth not appertain unto you, and that I could draw no hope of life from the same. But I come here only to die, and thus to yield myself humbly to the will of the king my lord. And if in my life I did ever offend the king's grace, surely with my death I do now atone for the same. And I blame not my judges, nor any other manner of person, nor anything save the cruel law of the land by which I die. But be this, and be my faults as they may, I beseech you all, good friends, to pray for the life of the king my sovereign lord and yours, who is one of the best princes on the face of the earth, and who hath always treated me so well, that better could not be: wherefore I submit to death with a good-will, humbly asking pardon of all the world." Then with her own hands, she took her coifs from her head, and delivered them to one

of her ladies, and then putting on a little cap of linen to cover her hair withal, she said, 'Alas, poor head! in a very brief space thou wilt roll in the dust on this scaffold; and as in life thou didst not merit to wear the crown of a queen, so in death, thou deservest not a better doom than this. And ye, my damsels, who, whilst I lived, ever shewed yourselves so diligent in my service, and who are now to be present at my last hour and mortal agony, as in good fortune ye were faithful to me, so even at this my miserable death ye do not forsake me. And as I cannot reward you for your true service to me, I pray you take comfort for my loss; howbeit, forget me not; and be always faithful to the king's grace, and to her whom with happier fortune ye may have as your queen and mistress. And esteem your honour far beyond your life; and in your prayers to the Lord Jesu, forget not to pray for my soul.'

"And being minded to say no more, she knelt down upon both knees, and one of her ladies covered her eyes with a bandage, and then they withdrew themselves some little space, and knelt down over against the scaffold, bewailing bitterly and shedding many tears. And thus, and without more to say or do, was her head stricken off; she making no confession of her fault, and only saying, 'O Lord God, have pity on my soul;' and one of her ladies then took up the head, and the others the body, and covering them with a sheet, did put them into a chest which there stood ready, and carried them to the church which is within the Tower."

There is nothing which the Drama could add to move terror and pity when the curtain should drop upon the closing scene of this tragedy. But History has one fact to add, still more awful. It is the one fact which shows us how more terrible is the condition of a man utterly heartless and shameless, who, having moved all the instruments of so-called justice to accomplish the death of the wife of his most ardent devotion—and having in this accomplishment also procured her child to be held illegitimate, as he had willed as to the child of a former wife—at length is joyous and triumphant. Queen Anne was beheaded on the 19th of May. On the 20th Henry was married to Jane Seymour. The council exhorted him, we are told, to marry immediately, for a state necessity. Nature cries out against the outrage upon all the decencies of life; but the political philosopher says, "he looked upon matrimony as an indifferent official act which his duty required at the moment."* We can find no reasonable cause to doubt that from

* Froude, "History," vol. ii. p. 502.

the first step to the last, the charge was got up, the indictments prepared, the juries selected, the peers upon the trial nominated, the marriage with Jane Seymour settled,—and last, but not least significant fact, a new parliament called for the sole purpose of making a new law of succession, before the cannon of the Tower had announced that Anne had perished. That parliament met on the 8th of June. We know not the date of the writs of summons; but it was absolutely impossible that the elections could have taken place, and Peers and Commons have been in their places within eighteen days of the execution of Anne, had not those writs been issued at the same time as the order for a special commission was issued, namely, on the 24th of April. Even this date would only allow forty-three days. The writs for a new parliament were usually returnable in three months. The death of the queen was manifestly “a foregone conclusion.”

The recent historian of this period, as we venture to think, has carried his admiration of the self-asserting force of character in Henry VIII. to an extent which blinds him to the hideousness of the acts in which that force is too often exhibited. Mr. Froude has given us this alternative—to receive his history, in its endeavours to prove a “human being sinful whom the world has ruled to be innocent,” as “a re-assertion of the truth, or the shame of noble names which have not deserved it at our hands.”* Which are the “noble names?” Cranmer? the amiable and timid, who furnishes the most direct evidence that he believed in Anne’s innocence, but did not dare to assert it. Cromwell? to whom his master’s word was as the breath of his nostrils. Audley? who in begging, again and again, for a due share of the plunder of the monasteries, makes this forcible appeal to the king’s favour, “I have in this world sustained great damage and infamy in serving the king’s highness, which this grant shall recompense.” Rich? the betrayer of Fisher and More—the branded perjurer—the slavish flatterer, who, when Speaker of the House of Commons in 1537, compared Henry to Solomon for prudence, to Samson for strength, and to Absalom for beauty,—the very sun which warmed and enlightened the universe. Norfolk? the declared enemy of his niece, Anne,—he, who upon an offence given to Henry by some of his family, in 1541, deprecates the anger of the king by avowing that he had betrayed the words of his mother-in-law; and, using not the language of an Englishman but of a slave dreading the bowstring, lays himself

* Froude, vol. ii. p. 540.

at Henry’s feet as a poor wretch, and claims as a merit, “the small love my two false traitorous nieces, [Anne Boleyn and Catherine Howard] and my mother-in-law, have borne unto me.”* Fitzwilliam? who is distinctly accused, in Constantine’s letter to Cromwell, of having deceived the unhappy Norris into making some false confessions, which he recanted in the most positive manner upon his arraignment and at his execution—Fitzwilliam? the king’s treasurer, to whom Baynton deplors that only one will confess—(the racked musician), “wherefore it should much touch the king’s honour if no further appear.” The lives of six persons were as nothing compared with “the king’s honour.” Such are some of the leading men in this proceeding—the “noble names” that are to make us accept the accusations against Anne Boleyn, as confirmed by her judges, “as proofs of Holy Writ.” We are told that, “if the Catholics could have fastened the stain of murder on the king and the statesmen of England, they would have struck the faith of the Establishment a harder blow than by a poor tale of scandal against a weak, erring, suffering woman:” and that “the Protestants, in mistaken generosity, have courted an infamy for the names of those to whom they owe their being, which, staining the fountain, must stain for ever the stream which flows from it.” Are we for ever to read history under the fear that if we trust to the everlasting principles of justice—to our hatred of oppression—to our contempt for sycophancy and worldly-mindedness—we may be “staining the fountain” which we regard as a well of life? Is there no firmer resting-place for true thought than is to be found in the debateable ground between Catholics and Protestants? Is there no common platform of historical evidence upon which both can meet to examine such questions honestly and temperately? What, in truth, have the personal motives which led to the rejection of papal supremacy—what the seizure of first fruits and tenths by the crown—what the avarice that prompted the destruction of the monasteries—what the burnings for heresy—what the “six articles” of 1539, by which all men were to be “regimented” into belief—what have these to do with the Protestant “fountain,” or the “stream which flows from it?” Still less ought the verdict of him who thoughtfully weighs the almost total absence of satisfactory evidence against Anne Boleyn in the one scale,—and the undeniable wilfulness, cruelty, revenge, and lust of Henry in the other,—to be considered as an imputation against the strength of

* State Papers, vol. i. p. 172.

the principles on which the worship of Protestant England rests. Let us be thankful that, under the dispensations of God, there were very few righteous men called to do the evil work that accompanied the overthrow of the papal power—for we must acknowledge that the righteous men could not have done it so quickly and so effectually. But let us not compromise our moral sense by having what is called “a state necessity” proposed to us as the rule of wisdom and virtue. History may be so written as to make some believe that despotism is the only safeguard for a nation’s prosperity and happiness. It has been so written in by-gone times, and the sophistry is struggling for revival. But let this pass. Anne Boleyn sleeps in the chapel in the Tower, where so many other victims of tyranny sleep; and in spite of every laborious detraction, her fate will not be remembered without honest tears.

The bishops and abbots, quaking for fear—the lay lords and commoners, with a scent of spoil—thus got together within three weeks of the appalling events that were probably still imperfectly rumoured in distant parts of the kingdom, were told by Audley, the chancellor, of the great cause of their being unexpectedly summoned. The king desired them to determine as to the succession of the crown; for he knew, confessed the chancellor, that he was “himself obnoxious to infirmities and even death itself.” Amazing acknowledgment! The candid Audley adds, “a thing very rare for kings to think of.” Had the king had dreams, when all should have gone “merry as a marriage bell?” Did he see where “death keeps his court,”—

“Scoffing his state, and grinning at his pomp—

Allowing him a breath, a little scene

To monarchise, be feared, and kill with looks.”*

Somebody, perhaps, had told him, in as gentle language as was used to the dauphin of France, that kings sometimes did die. But, with that morbid craving for power after the grave is closed upon him, that marks the selfish and tyrannous man, whether there is a crown, to be disposed of or a house and lands, king Henry contrived that his parliament should pass the most unconstitutional statute that had ever attempted to convert the ancient monarchy into a personalty, making the crown a chattel, for any royal flat-terer to take by bequest, and “put it in his pocket.” England was delivered over, bound hand and foot, to Henry by the prostration

* Richard II., act iii. scene 2.

of this parliament. It was enacted—the issue of the marriage with Catherine being rendered illegitimate by a previous statute, and by reason of a divorce pronounced before the execution of the late lady Anne for treason, her daughter Elizabeth was therefore illegitimate, that marriage being “never good nor consonant to the laws,”—that the oath taken to uphold that succession was to be superseded by another oath to maintain the issue of the late marriage with the king’s “entirely beloved wife” queen Jane; and that all who should assert the lawfulness of the issue of the former marriages should be guilty of high treason. Here were two daughters of the king precluded from inheriting the throne. Naturally enough, the people would consider whom they were to obey, if there should be no issue of this third marriage. Never was the danger of a disputed succession more imminent. Was the danger likely to be removed by an enactment that, on failure of issue, the king might limit the descent of the crown, by letters patent, or by his will, to any person in possession or remainder, who shall be obeyed accordingly, whether male or female? The object was that Henry might bequeath the crown to his illegitimate son, the duke of Richmond. But the object was defeated by One greater than King, Lords, or Commons. The duke died whilst the bill was passing through parliament.

Mary, the king’s first daughter, is now a little more than twenty years of age; Elizabeth is scarcely three years. Mary has incurred the greatest perils by her undaunted refusal to receive the marriage of her mother as unlawful. “For a great while she could not be persuaded to submit to the king; who, being impatient of contradiction from any, but especially from his own child, was resolved to strike a terror in all his people by putting her openly to death.”* Burnet adds, that Cranmer induced the king to relax from his atrocious resolve. But the princess was kept from court, and lived in great seclusion. There is a story, for which no authority is given, that Anne Boleyn, on the last evening of her life, fell on her knees before the wife of the lieutenant of the Tower, requesting her to go to the lady Mary, and in the same way kneeling before her, beg her to pardon an unfortunate woman the wrongs she had done her.† Be this true or not, it is clear that the removal of Anne was considered an opportunity for the lady Mary again to approach her stern father. Cromwell appears to have been solicitous to

* Burnet, “History of the Reformation,” part ii. book ii.

† Lingard, vol. vi. p. 323.

effect a reconciliation; and partly by his threats, and partly by his entreaties, the unhappy woman was led to make a complete renunciation of all her former opinions—to accept the king as the Supreme Head of the Church; to “utterly refuse the bishop of Rome’s pretended authority, power, and jurisdiction within this realm;” and to recognise the marriage of her mother with the king as unlawful, by God’s law and man’s law. The abject style in which the daughter creeps in the dust before the parent—the fulsome flattery in which she endeavours to propitiate his favour—are proofs of the terror which that man inspired, and of the arts which all who came within the reach of his power exercised to disarm his ferocity. Thus Mary writes: “As I have, and shall, knowing your excellent learning, virtue, wisdom, and knowledge, put my soul into your direction; and by the same hath and will, in all things from henceforth, direct my conscience, so my body I do wholly commit to your mercy and fatherly pity; desiring no state, no condition, nor no manner degree of living, but such as Your Grace shall appoint unto me; knowledging and confessing, that my state can not be so vile, as either the extremity of justice would appoint unto me, or as mine offences have required and deserved.”* She was well instructed. She had at length learnt the parrot note with which the despot, so vain-glorious of his “learning, virtue, wisdom and knowledge” was to be approached. She had no opinion, when asked to declare herself upon doctrinal points, but “such as she should receive from the king, who had her whole heart in his keeping.” Upon pilgrimage, purgatory, and relics she had no guide but the king’s “inestimable virtue, high wisdom, and excellent learning.” She saved her head by this duplicity, for which it would be scarcely fair to blame her; but she took her revenge for a long suppression of her real opinions, by exacting conformity to them when the gibbet and the stake were at her own command.

* State Papers, vol. i. p. 457.

Note to page 375.

LETTER OF ANNE BOLEYN TO HENRY VIII.

In the Cotton Library. The parts burnt are in Italics.

SIR,
Your Grace’s displeasure and my imprisonment are things soe *strange* unto me, as what to wrighte, or what to excuse, I am altogether ignorant. Whereas you send unto me, (willing me to confesse a truth, and soe to obteyne your favour) by such an whome you know to be mine antient professed enemy, I noe sooner received this message by him, then I rightly conceived your meaning; and if as *you say*, confessing a truth indeed may procure my safitie I shall use all willingnesse and dutie perform your command. But let not your Grace ever imagine that your poore wife will ever be brought to *acknowledge* a fault, where not soe much as a thought ever proceeded. *And to speake* a truth, never a prince had wife more loyall in all duty, and in all true affection, then you have ever found in *Anne Bolen*, with which name and place I could willingly have contented myself, if God and your Grace’s pleasure had so bene pleased. *Neither* did I at any time soe farre forgett my selfe in my exaltation, or received queenship, but that I alwayes looked for such an alteration as now I finde; for the ground of my preferment being on noe surer foundation than your Grace’s fancye, the least alteration was fitt and sufficient (I knowe) to draw that fancye to some other subjecte. You have chosen me from a low estate to be your queene and companion farre beyond my desert or desire; if then you found me worthy of such honour, good your Grace let not any light fancye, or bade counsell of my enemies withdraw your princely favour from me; neither lett that stayne, that unworthy stayne of a disloyall hart towards your good Grace, ever cast so soule a blott one your most dutifull wife, and the infant princessse your daughter. Trye me, good king, but let me have a lawfull tryall; and let not my sworne enemies sit as my accusers and judges; yee let me receive an open tryall, for my truth shall fear noe open shames. Then shall you see either mine innocencye cleared, your suspition and conscience satisfied, the ignominye and slander of the world stopped, or my guilt openly declared. Soe that whatsoever God or you may determine of your Grace may be freed from an open censure, and mine offence, being soe lawfully proved, your Grace is at liberty both before God and man, not only to execute worthy punishment on me as an unfaithfull wife, but to follow your affection already settled one that partie, for whose sake I am now as I am, whose name I could some good while since have pointed unto, your Grace being not ignorant of my suspition therein.

But if you have already determined of me, and that not only my death, but an infamous slander must bring you the joying of your desired happines, then I desire of God that he will pardon your great sinne herein, and likewise my enemies the instruments thereof, and that he will not call you to a straight accompt for your unprincely and cruell usage of me, at his generall judgement seat, where both you and my selfe must shortly appeare, and in whose just judgement I doubt not, what soever the world may thinke of mee, mine innocencye shall be openly knowene, and sufficiently cleared. My last and only request shall be, that my selfe may only beare the burthen of your Grace’s displeasure;