

ART. IV.—“HENRY VIII.”¹

MR. POLLARD'S volume is the latest addition to that splendid series which has given us Creighton's "Elizabeth," Gardiner's "Cromwell," and various dissertations about the Stuarts. This volume is equal to any of its predecessors in the quality and interest of the portraits which it contains. Those who remember the Tudor Exhibition will know what excellent materials there are to reproduce, and they should welcome, among other reproductions, Holbein's magnificent Duke of Norfolk. The coloured frontispiece of the King himself is both richer and mellowed than the previous experiments in colour. Many readers may possibly regret Mr. Pollard's determination to exclude foreign portraits. Julius II., Leo X., Clement VII., Paul III., Charles V., and Francis I. were all actors in this period of English history, and most of them exist in masterpieces of portraiture. In any case, it is a pity that Erasmus was excluded. That pre-eminent wit and scholar belongs to no single nation. He is a citizen of the world, and is not affected by centuries or frontiers. His English friends, his visits here, his enchanting letters to us and about us, his connection with both Universities and his official duties at one of them, his practical service to the reformation of our theology and learning, all give us so real a claim to him that his exclusion may be described as an affront. Many of us, too, would certainly have been glad to possess an adequate reproduction of Stretes' beautiful and fascinating Edward VI., which was at the New Gallery this year, especially as no engraving of it is known to exist.

As we turn from the portraits to the history, Mr. Pollard must be congratulated and thanked for producing the best life of Henry VIII. which has yet been written. Henry and his reign have never ceased to be the subjects of partisan accounts, or the pretexts for theological disputes. Innumerable theories about the King and his period have been in fashion, and have infected almost every historian. There is the old-fashioned Protestant theory that all the proceedings of Henry and of the Reformers were absolutely right; that it was, somehow, disloyal to our constitution in Church and State to challenge their characters or their motives. There is the narrower Roman Catholic view, which can see nothing right in anything which was done by the Reformers and their partisans. From these principles we know by experience what will follow. The defects in Henry's character are made the most of. They alone are made out to be the cause, not

¹ By A. F. Pollard. Goupil. £3 3s.

only of the divorce, but of the Royal Supremacy, of the separation from Rome, and therefore of the whole development of our history and institutions. Those who adopt this view seem to ignore the actual state of the Church from the thirteenth century to the sixteenth, just as they ignore some of the chief elements in our own early and mediæval history. There is, again, that presentation of Henry VIII. which sets him before us as a King who, in the eyes of the Constitution and of Mr. Froude, can do no wrong. That view is exceedingly plausible; it removes innumerable difficulties; it is argued with unrivalled ingenuity; it is expressed in a style of unusual power and penetration. Mr. Froude's work almost attains to the simplicity and victory of genius, but it has succumbed in detail to the publication of the State Papers. I say in detail, and I use the term strictly, because I think Mr. Froude's work, in spite of all its errors, still holds the field as the strongest and truest exposition of English affairs during the sixteenth century. He saw clearly the principles and forces which were contending for the mastery of England in that "time of her visitation." He saw no less clearly that the health and life of England depended on the victory of progress and freedom, as against the forces of repression and reaction. It is quite easy to convict Mr. Froude of partiality, of passion, and of innumerable mistakes; but if ever the causes of liberty and progress should be endangered by a clerical reaction, it is probable that the country would rally to Mr. Froude's History, as an expression both of grievances and of their remedy, just as our forefathers rallied, in similar circumstances, to Foxe's "Acts and Monuments." That history, too, has been attacked in detail, and in some instances justly. Nevertheless, Foxe holds his ground in his general presentation of the case between the Reformers and the Reactionaries, or, as it might be stated, between the Church at large and the clerical profession. That is precisely Mr. Froude's position, as I conceive it, in his dramatic and patriotic handling of the battle between progress and reaction.

The State Papers prove that some of Mr. Froude's details are inaccurate, and some of his deductions untenable. His portrait of Henry VIII. will not bear examination, and his portrait of Elizabeth is even less worthy of the original; but these flaws do not affect his broad and strong conception of the principles with which Englishmen had to deal in the sixteenth century. Since Mr. Froude began to write, an immense quantity of material has been made accessible and arranged. Mr. Pollard has mastered all this information. Out of it he has constructed a new portrait of Henry VIII. It is really a finer and more flattering portrait than Mr.

Froude's. It is also truer, for it will bear minute examination; and the more thoroughly the details of the history be known, the more gratefully will Mr. Pollard's view of Henry be accepted by all impartial judges. Mr. Pollard knows the times and the characters which he describes. If his observation be minute, his vision is clear and large. It is not confined to English history. He sees that ecclesiastical and theological disputes must not be separated from political, social, economical, and intellectual affairs. He considers all the elements in a difficult and complex problem, and his conclusions are satisfying. They carry conviction with them, and should be most satisfactory to those who are most capable of judging.

Some criticism of details is generally expected from a reviewer. Some reviewers appear to think that the discovery of a blemish covers them with distinction, at the expense of the author whom they review. I have only one small blemish to point out, and I mention it only that it may be corrected, because in itself it is very unimportant. In two places Mr. Pollard speaks of "Lionel, Duke of Clarence," where he means obviously George, brother of Richard III., son-in-law of the great Earl of Warwick, father of Lady Salisbury, and grandfather of Cardinal Pole. Duke Lionel was a son of Edward III., and he married Violante of Milan. So far as I have noticed, there is no other technical error in Mr. Pollard's volume; and his literature is no less admirable and sound than his history. Like Bishop Creighton in his "Elizabeth," Mr. Pollard sees that a volume of this kind should be a personal and psychological study. It should be the drawing of a character, even more than the history of a time. In that respect, the previous volume on Charles II. leaves a great deal to be desired, and even Mr. Gardiner's "Cromwell" is not altogether satisfying. I hope we shall one day have a "William III." in this series, as well done as "Elizabeth" and "Henry VIII."

There was no period in our history so critical as the sixteenth century. It was the bridge between the mediæval and the modern world; and the way in which that bridge was crossed has decided the fate of many nations. Some nations crossed it unwillingly, looking back, and so turning into salt which hath lost its savour. Others looked forward, and accepted the new light, and followed it courageously; and they have had their reward. "Old things," as Mr. Froude has written, "were passing away, and the faith and life of ten centuries were dissolving like a dream. . . . A new continent had risen up beyond the western sea. The floor of heaven, inlaid with stars, had sunk back into an infinite abyss of immeasurable space; and the firm earth itself, unfixed from

its foundations, was seen to be but a small atom in the awful vastness of the universe." The ancient world rose again, after its burial of a thousand years. The language of the New Testament and of early Christianity was recovered. Men began to deal with realities and facts, instead of dreaming and making syllogisms. The intellectual machinery of the Middle Ages found something tangible to work upon. All this new wealth of learning and knowledge was made acceptable by the new art of printing; "the last and greatest gift," as Luther says, "by which God enables us to advance the things of the Gospel."

Into this new world Henry VIII. was born. He received its culture, and lived to see it established in his kingdom. Mr. Pollard shows him to us a young Sovereign, full not only of promise, but of performance, hailed as the inaugurator of a golden age, the first English King who was touched by the Renaissance, and one of the most accomplished of our rulers. He personified in himself the new age, and he also represented the character of his people, in their defects and limitations, as well as in their better qualities. He is presented to us a fairly industrious King, apparently amusing himself, but watching his affairs, and learning, and preparing to lay hold of them when he felt his time had come. We see him, as well, honest, enthusiastic, loyal to the established order as he found it, reverential to the Pope, respectful to the Emperor, but gradually deceived and disillusioned by his father-in-law of Aragon, by such a Pope as Julius II., by Francis I., by his wife's kinsmen of the House of Austria. Henry might have been an idealist in More's "Utopia," and he found himself in the world of Machiavelli's "Prince." Mr. Pollard has dealt very finely and skilfully with Henry's psychological development out of an inexperienced and generous youth into a stern and calculating ruler.

In spite of all his arbitrary ways, he carried the nation with him. Indeed, he could not have existed without the national support. The country wanted above all things a firm Government, and it dreaded above all things a return of the civil wars through a disputed succession. These two elements in the problem go far to explain Henry's success. To avoid a dispute about the Crown, the people were willing to see rival claimants abolished if necessary. To make the succession safer, they tolerated or encouraged all Henry's matrimonial adventures. It must be remembered that his marriage with his brother's widow was disliked and doubted from the first; that the Papal power to dispense was by no means accepted as beyond question; and that the deaths of numerous children increased the doubts and scruples, especi-

ally in the King himself. All these matters were discussed and pondered long before Anne Boleyn came upon the scene. The matter was complicated still further by the relationship of Katharine to Charles V., and by the dependence of the Pope on that Emperor. Charles maintained the cause of his aunt; though, as Mr. Pollard shows, his actions were governed to a large extent by policy and interest. Henry's case was never judged fairly. The Pope was not a free or an impartial judge. His decision was influenced by the question of the Papal States, and also by the prospects of his own House in Tuscany. It was not surprising, therefore, that Henry began to question the nature and limits of the Papal authority itself. His questions were raised at a time when scholarship was throwing a new light upon the origins of Papacy. The scandals of the Church and the obstacles placed in the way of all reform had made men long for a change. The strength of the Crown enabled the Government to deal firmly with the clergy; and so the Reformation came about. Henry undoubtedly had a good case for his first divorce. He undoubtedly spoilt it by selfishness, brutality, and folly. The divorce was not the cause of the Reformation, but it certainly was the occasion for making it a practical question. The Papal claims, it must be remembered, too, were not only challenged in England, but in every country where the civil power was not reactionary and repressive. The conduct of Henry's case was a flagrant example of Papal injustice and misgovernment. In reasserting the Royal Supremacy, Henry was not claiming or inventing new powers; he was merely strengthening ancient rights, many of which were not even dormant. In all these matters Mr. Pollard shows great skill, knowledge, and impartiality.

There is one side of the Church question upon which Mr. Pollard scarcely touches, and that is the dissolution of the Religious Orders. He does not show how this was, primarily, an economical and social question, through the immense wealth possessed by those corporations; nor how it was a political and national question, through the dependence of the Orders and of their wealth upon a foreign Power. It was a question, in that aspect of it, upon which the whole supremacy and freedom of the Crown really turned. Compromises have been accepted between the Papacy and various Rulers in these affairs, but no solution has yet been arrived at by which their clashing and incompatible claims have been adjusted. The troubles which have been caused perpetually by the Religious Orders, and the incubus which they become to every country where they are established, justify the policy of Henry and Cromwell in sweeping them away.

Mr. Pollard deals most skilfully with the question of foreign relations and policy during Henry's reign. He shows how dangerous Henry's position often was, and how he faced his difficulties with marvellous courage and ability. Upon a knowledge of these questions must depend our judgment about the various executions in Henry's reign. Those who suffered were not murdered capriciously. Their executions all had to do with intrigues about the succession, or with conspiracies aided and planned with foreign Powers, who were acting usually in the interests of the Papacy. We must lament that Sir Thomas More fell a victim to the difficult times in which he lived, and to his faith in that Papal authority which was not fully examined before his death. Fisher, as we know now, was implicated in treasonable correspondence.

Henry VIII. was a strong man, who guided us, without disaster, through a dangerous and an inevitable crisis. It was inevitable if we were to remain true to our national traditions. He "broke the bonds of Rome," in Gray's words, and secured our freedom as a Church and Nation. He gave us our place and function in the modern world. Our national freedom and our imperial growth date from his reign. To him we owe the existence and organization of our present naval power. To him, again, we owe those new landed families, the successors of the monks, who were the chief barrier against reaction under Mary, and the chief support of Elizabeth in her battles with the Papacy and Spain. Their descendants were the chief opponents of Charles I., and the leaders of the revolution against James II. Surely they have served the country better than the effete and selfish Religious Orders would have done.

Mr. Pollard sums up the whole matter by saying: "It was not Henry, but the Reformation, which put the kingdoms of Europe to the hazard. The Sphinx propounded her riddle to all nations alike, and all were required to answer: Should they cleave to the old, or should they embrace the new? Some pressed forward, others held back, and some, to their own confusion, replied in dubious tones. Surrounded with doubting hearts and unstable minds, Henry VIII. neither faltered nor failed. He ruled in a ruthless age with a ruthless hand; he dealt with a violent crisis by methods of blood and iron, and his measures were crowned with whatever sanction worldly success can give. Whether or no the history of England for the past four centuries has been all a mistake, whether or no she took the wrong path at the parting of the ways in 1529, it was well for her peace and material comfort that she had for her King, in her hour of need, a man, and a

man who counted the cost, faced the risk, and did with his might whatsoever his hand found to do."

We can have little doubt that England chose the right path at the parting of the ways: whether she have always walked in it rightly is a more dubious question. We must remember that other and deeper causes were at work than those which politics can touch. So far as this world goes, Henry's methods may be justified by stern necessity; but the methods of blood and iron would in themselves have been of no lasting use unless there had been working alongside of them those methods, not of this world, upon which kingdoms and individuals ultimately depend. We have no right to accept the great and responsible inheritance which the men of that generation have bequeathed to us without making every allowance for the dangers and difficulties of those who gained it. Among these Henry VIII. stands pre-eminent, and Mr. Pollard has done a splendid act of justice by showing his figure as it really was, dominating and guiding that terrific storm. Popular sympathy is often given too easily to those who opposed the principles and causes for the triumph of which we are indebted to Henry VIII. The King's difficulties and dangers are ignored, and the means he was driven to use against them are alone remembered. Mr. Seebohm has put that side of the case well where he says: "Who can fail to be impressed with the terrible responsibility, in the eye of history, resting upon those by whom in the sixteenth century, at the time of the crisis, the reform was refused? They were utterly powerless, indeed, to stop the ultimate flow of the tide, but they had the terrible power to turn what might otherwise have been a steady and peaceful stream into a turbulent and devastating flood. They had the terrible power, and they used it, to involve their own and ten succeeding generations in the turmoils of revolution." The descendants of Henry VIII. and his age have, at any rate, been spared from the revolutions which have devastated and still threaten some of the nations which took the other path at the time of the Reformation, just as Henry's ability and firmness saved our country from the wars and massacres which devastated the same countries in that age of trial.

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