

## HENRY VIII.

As Seen from State Papers.

With praiseworthy regularity Mr. Gardner continues to publish the volumes of the Monumental Calendar of Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the reign of Henry VIII. Like its immediate predecessors, the last annual instalment merely catalogues the documents of little more than six months, namely, the first half of the year 1538, but the mass of material to be dealt with is clearly so enormous that it is not wonderful that the work of arranging, indexing and epitomizing cannot be done with greater rapidity nor compressed within narrower limits. Anxious as we all are that the historical papers of so deeply important and interesting a period should be made accessible to all as quickly as may be, it is perhaps as well that the nature of the case renders it impossible to push forward the work with greater rapidity. The delay between each instalment is far an advantage that it gives time to the student to consider well the bearing of the documents calendared in the volume on the verdict which posterity will be called upon to pronounce finally upon the character and doings of one who, to put it mildly, was perhaps the most extraordinary monarch who ever sat upon this or any other throne. As the complicated story of this reign becomes clearer with each successive volume, assisted as the reader is by Mr. Gardner's calm and judicial summary of the documents, as facts get marshalled into order and doubtful documents get dated, we feel sure that few can be so blinded by their admiration for the King, who established the Royal Headship of the English Church, as not to mark the shadows deepening upon the picture of the real Henry. Gradually but surely as the work of sorting and arranging progresses, the founder of the present English State religion is being divested of the glory with which the imagination of enthusiastic reformers had clothed him, and his standing revealed by his own State Papers in all the blackness of his real character. Deceitful in his dealings and unrestrained in his selfishness, is the man we are compelled to recognize in the portrait, the main features of which are now complete. At the beginning of 1538 Henry was in a more secure position than he had been twelve months previously. The various rising against his tyranny and in defence of the old religion had failed, and the North had been punished by his heavy hand without a thought of mercy. The country was at least quiet, although there is ample evidence of concealed popular disaffection at the royal doings, and in particular at the rejection by Henry's *sic volo sic jubeo* of Papal Supremacy, and at the novel assumption of ecclesiastical jurisdiction by the Crown. Abroad the dispensations granted by royal license for the Lent of this year caused great amusement. "The King of England," said Francis I., "gives dispensations like his Holiness, and I believe will soon want to sing Mass." It is, of course, in the ecclesiastical affairs of the period, covered by the volume of the Calendar, that we are chiefly interested or concerned, and as the drama of the suppression of the English monastic houses unfolds, there is ample material for our consideration.

The Royal Commissioners were early afield this year, visiting, "defaming," and generally harassing the unfortunate inmates of the religious houses into disaffection or surrender. There can be no doubt, whatever, that from the outset, in spite of the many declarations of Henry and his officials to the contrary, the entire suppression of the Monastic Order had been determined upon. For legal possession of the monasteries and their estates even

the King had need of some kind of surrender, and the royal agents were instructed to try by all means in their power to get the religious "willingly to consent and agree" to their own corporate extinction. Should their gentle persuasion fail to induce the hapless monks and nuns thus to satisfy the King, or, as the instructions issued for the guidance of the Commissioners put it, "if they shall find any of the said houses and convents, so appointed to be dissolved, so wilful and obstinate that they will in no wise submit themselves, in that case" they are to use force to take possession of the lands and valuables and to punish "such obstinate and wilful" resistance to the royal pleasure.

As was natural, report was soon busy as to the ultimate intentions of the Crown, and the appearance of the notorious Dr. Layton, who was accompanied by Southwell, one of the officers of the new Court of Augmentation, in the East of England, set men's tongues going as to the imminent fate of the monastic establishments. It was even said openly in Cambridge shire that such large and important houses as Ely and Bury had been marked out for destruction. "Which bruit to stop and to satisfy the people," "I went with expedition to the abbey and priories, calling unto me all such gentlemen and honest men as were high inhabitants there." To them Dr. Layton declared that "in this they utterly slandered the King," and commanded the abbots to "set in the stocks" all who spread such reports if they were "knaves," and to report them to the Council if they were gentlemen. "Still," writes Mr. Gardiner, "in spite of Dr. Layton's denial, in spite even of the King's own denial, conveyed to some monasteries by Cromwell, it is impossible not to suspect that the complete suppression of monastic houses had been resolved on. For there is no break in the process from first to last—for two whole years it was quite continuous. And who, even at the first, could be quite deceived—what Abbot's or private could be quite reassured—after hearing of different surrenders already accomplished, by being informed that they were altogether voluntary? Who would be so simple as to much store by the assurance that the king would not have received these houses if overtures had not been made to him for their acceptance" (p. 6). The general scramble for the possession of the religious houses had commenced, and it was well enough understood by the court favorites. "Item to remember Launde for my part thereof"—the note set down by Thomas Cromwell at this period—"I have been a fair sample of the thoughts passing through the minds of many men at the time."

The best blessing a faithful servant could send to Lord Leslie, then at Calais, was that he might obtain a fair share of the plunder. "The abbey goes down as fast as conveniently they may, and be surrendered into the King's hand," he writes, "I pray God send you one among them to your part." It is impossible to do more than call attention to this important volume, which contains the summary of historical papers of the deepest interest, including those dealing with the Rood of Boxley, the Holy Blood of Halles, the persecution of the Abbot of Woburn, and Blessed John Forrest, as well as many documents regarding the suppression of the Orders of Friars. We cannot, however, conclude without calling attention to a passage in Mr. Gardner's preface which deserves consideration, as helping us to understand the conditions of men's minds at the time. "Nothing but the attentive perusal of such original documents," he writes, "will enable us to realize at this day how incredible it seemed to men of that generation that an old system was passing away completely, never to be recalled, that Papal supremacy had

received a death-blow—that the desecrated fane and ruined buildings so long held in reverence, were never to be devoted again to their ancient uses. Yet even now, while the piety of the age was shocked and men wondered if parish churches were to be pulled down next, they were told that there was to be no general suppression. Free surrenders, of course, there had been in some cases, and attainders there had been also, but men were asked to believe that there was no intention at all of upsetting the whole monastic system." Under the circumstances, then, we need not wonder if men became confused, and looking at the troubles as the result of a temporary phase in Henry's mind, thought by bending to the royal will for a time to avert possibly graver dangers to the Catholic faith.—*London Tablet*.



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