

SHAKESPEARE'S CATHARINE OF ARRAGON.

By Thomas Swift.

To come now to Henry VIII., the only play of Shakespeare that is connected with the Reformation. It can be stated with fair certainty that this play was written about 1612-1613, ten years after the death of Elizabeth; and, so far as is known, was first published in the famous First Folio in 1623, seven years after the author's demise.

It is a difficult drama to deal with from any standpoint, as only certain portions can be ascribed to Shakespeare; other parts of it being from the pen of the dramatists Fletcher and Ben Jonson, contemporaries of Shakespeare.

The work, as ascribed to the different authors, on the best authority, is as follows:—

TO SHAKESPEARE.—Act I. Scenes 1 and 2.
Act II. Scenes 3 and 4.
Act III. Scene 2 (in part).
Act V. Scene 1.
TO BEN JONSON.—Eighteen lines in Scene 4,
Act V. beginning "Nor shall this peace sleep with her," down to "Shall see this and bless her."

TO FLETCHER.—The remaining portions of the play.

The second scene in Act IV., which deals with Catharine's death, was conceived by Shakespeare and carried out in the spirit of his design by Fletcher. This play was probably the last dramatic effort of Shakespeare, and in time and historical matter the nearest to his own day. Indeed, in his life in London, he must have met and conversed with people of high educational and social status, who were youths at the time of the fate-

ful event set forth in the play, and men during the later years of Henry VIII.'s reign.

During these years down to the end of the Tudor period, men were more engaged in making than in writing history. Poetry and fancy ruled the literature of the day; so much so, that it was the fashion to record even the events of history in the pleasing forms of poems and dramas. On this account, therefore, the historical plays of Shakespeare have a two-fold value. They are gems of literature, as well as fairly truthful expositions of historical events. Few men, who are familiar with his English historical plays, realize how much of their own historical lore they have obtained from them. When Pitt, the Elder, was asked where he had read his English history, he answered, "In the plays of Shakespeare."

By reason of his extensive and acute knowledge of history and his close adherence to historical outlines Shakespeare must be regarded as a very eminent authority, and particularly so in reference to the course of events during the reign of Henry VIII.

The central point of the play of Henry VIII., is the divorce of Catharine of Arragon, which Shakespeare, along with all unbiased historians, makes out to be the moving cause of the Reformation in England. On it everything turned as on a pivot. It was a most delicate and touchy point to be handled during the reign of Eliz-