

## CATHERINE OF ARRAGON AND HER RIVAL.

BY JANE STRICKLAND.

IN contemplating the untimely death of Ann Boleyn, we suffer our feelings to get the better of our judgment. We forget the broken heart of Catherine and only think upon the scaffold, the false accusation and the severed head of her rival. We see youth, beauty, and talents vainly flinging their charms round the insensible and unnatural tyrant. We see him slandering, vilifying and thirsting for the life-blood of the woman he had "delighted to honor," and ere that blood was cold giving her name and place to another. We lament over this unhappy victim of lust and tyranny, and generously forget her crimes in her dreadful fall. We no longer view her as the supplanter of Queen Catherine's rights, as the cruel stepmother and ambitious woman. Her misfortunes fling a veil over her faults which Pity forbids Justice to remove. Truth, however, while she allows the claims of this unfortunate lady to our sympathy, obliges us to declare that she neither deserved her elevation nor conducted herself well during her short-lived possession of power. While espousing the husband of another her heart remained untouched. It was to the King, not to the man she loved, her hand was given. She was the victim of ambition not of love. The accomplished author of *De Vere* says: "We feel almost inclined to pity Henry when Ann Boleyn declared on her trial that the King never had her heart." In this point we must differ from him on the ground that the affections of an aspiring woman are little worth. Raynal in relating the elevation of this unfortunate lady remarks that, "the ambition of Ann Boleyn kept her chaste." Still her many fascinating qualities win upon us. We know not in what light to regard her character, whether to view her as the murderess of Sir Thomas More, as the cruel stepmother of Mary, or as the amiable protectress of the Protestant church. In the last closing scene, we see her as a penitent woman lamenting her errors yet asserting her innocence with becoming dignity, acknowledging with noble candour those faults of which no one dared accuse her, but maintaining her purity with the majesty of truth. Sometimes we behold the lightning of her wit bursting from the dense clouds of calumny that surround her, and illuminating with a deceitful blaze, the dark horizon along which her sun was destined prematurely to set. At other times when we see her weeping in her prison like a bereaved mother or a penitent Magdalen, we feel inclined to echo her pathetic exclamation: "Alas has Mark Lancelton died without clearing

my innocence," and like her stepdaughter, we weep over her fate and only remember her shining qualities. We forget the beheaded More, the broken-hearted Catherine, while we follow her to the scaffold.

In the character of Catherine of Arragon we scarcely discover the shades that mark the daughters of mortality, in fact we rather imagine than find them.

Perfection is far a higher state, and therefore this good and great Queen must have had faults, although the eye of the historian may have failed to discover them. Her private correspondence displays the correctness of her judgment and the goodness of her heart in the brightest colors. Yet these letters on which she did not think the eyes of posterity would look; show us at once the woman and Queen. We particularly cite that preserved amongst many others in Ellis' *Historical Letters* in which Catherine informs her consort of his victory over the Scottish King at Flodden as a beautiful instance of generous pity for the vanquished and conjugal tenderness for the victor. We see this highminded and injured lady maintaining a mild ascendancy over the heart of a tyrant, long after the charms of youth had faded (if indeed she ever possessed them) standing between him and the people like a mediating angel forbidding the axe to fall on his destined victims, nor were her learning, piety and modesty inferior to her sweetness of temper and love of justice. Sincere and single hearted herself she long believed Henry's conduct arose from scruples of conscience rather than from alienated love. Her pathetic appeal to him during her trial, at once so wise, so simple and confiding, excited his admiration, although it failed to move his purpose. He threw his better angel from his side and became the most monstrous bigot and tyrant that ever disgraced the pages of history. This great Princess, if she had lived five months longer, would have beheld the downfall of her unhappy rival, it is even probable that she heard the rumour of Henry's alienation of affection from his second wife before her dissolution. We may feel assured, moreover, that if Catherine's eyes had beheld the calamities of the fair usurper of her rights she would have dropped a generous tear over her ashes, rather than exulted in her misfortunes. The woes and rivalry of these illustrious ladies are over, they have passed into that land where all things are forgotten, and when they meet again (and surely it is no presumption to indulge such Christian hope,) may they be found as sisters rejoicing in the same glorious immortality before the throne of God.