

# HENRY THE EIGHTH

BY

FRANCIS HACKETT



JONATHAN CAPE  
THIRTY BEDFORD SQUARE  
LONDON



HENRY VIII

(About 1540)

From the Chalk Drawing by Holbein in the Royal Print Cabinet, Munich.

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From the Painting after Holbein in the Royal Collection at Windsor  
(By gracious permission of His Majesty The King.)

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## FOREWORD

IN case the state of Europe at the opening of the sixteenth century is not fresh or clear in the reader's mind, I have provided a short summary, a kind of historical backdrop, which will be found at the beginning of the book.

A word as to conversations. I have invented no dialogue. Thanks to the astonishingly full diplomatic correspondence, I could stick to the record and yet quote direct speech.

Most of the records are indicated to the psycho-historian in the twenty-one volumes of 'The Letters and Papers of the Reign of Henry VIII,' prepared under the direction of the Master of the Rolls—a stupendous wealth of material filling over twenty thousand packed pages. This is by no means the only material easily accessible. A bibliography prepared for me in Paris runs to 67 type-written pages. The sources are so rich as to be almost inexhaustible—there are few episodes that do not invite further research.

To be *then*-minded, to use imagination and intuition, to suggest life—this is the task of the psycho-historian. But no vividness excuses infidelity to the facts, and I have sought to base this history entirely on the material provided by the unselfish labour of a host of scholars, who, in matters of fact, must have the last word.

F. H.

Co. Wicklow

1929

TO  
SIGNE TOKSVIG

## THE BACKGROUND

*'The great and glorious masterpiece of man is to know how to live to purpose: all other things, to reign, to lay up treasure, to build, are, at most, but little appendices and props.'*

—MONTAIGNE.

## THE BACKGROUND

### I

HENRY was a king. His trade, which is a hard one, will not distract us from his manhood, but one cannot pretend that he lived in that private condition which would save us from clustering historic detail: from very early he belonged to that important class of marked people who live in the thick of politics and in the pith of society, seeing much of men and of women and having their hand forced by their public position much as the hod-carrier gets a sunken shoulder, or the city man gets angina pectoris, because of his way of life. Henry cannot be seen apart from his occupation, its nature and its diseases. He was a man before everything, but his kingship colours his drama and sets his scene.

The class to which he belonged has been marvellously extended since the sixteenth century. The number of new dynasties since 1500, the lard dynasty, the tin dynasty, the steel, the railway, the newspaper, the cotton, the copper, the coal, the rubber, the oil, the motor, has so crowded upon, and depressed, the waning reputation of kingship that modern magnates are not unlikely to be unfair to their prototypes, and to see Henry and his kind in the light of nominal monarchy, instead of seeing them as men and brothers, the founders or managing directors of great corporations and trusts.

Henry was a magnate of a type so genuine that to approach him as a picture on a playing-card is to miss his significance. What he had at stake was not money. It was power that took a different form and had grander and wider implications. With the oil that anointed him there came more than fleets, foundations, researches, or even war; there came the direct guidance of three million people, an effigy not only on the parliament and on the coins but in the people's corporate heart. The effulgence of a whole people with a longish history was shed upon him, and from him there came a vivid sense of the authority, if not of the duty, to which he had been consecrated. But if Henry was anointed with holier oil than Rockefeller-Morgan or Inchcape-Leverhulme, he pursued power in a manner no less typical and no less instinctive. He was a magnate to his finger-tips. He was

a magnate before he was a king. Hence, to make him intelligible, he has to be seen in the complicated throes of those rivalries that create his personal drama and give it such tremendous character. He has to be seen, particularly, in the Europe of 1500-1550, and in the company of Francis and Charles.

In the year 1500 itself, Henry and Francis and Charles were three small dukes. Within fifteen years, they would come to power, and this power would bring the three of them into the close juxtaposition and interaction that would last to the middle of the century when the curtain rings down. Before looking at the thrones they would inherit, and the Europe that would surround them, a glimpse may be taken of the three children who, wholly unknown to themselves, would act in such a manner that we feel the effects of it even to this day.

## II

In 1500 Henry is a boy of nine. He is a big dimpled child with cream and rose complexion, self-willed yet ductile. He can be managed, if his petulance is understood, and his tutor finds him intelligent and full of application, considering that, like most human beings, he cannot keep his mind on anything for any length of time. He is the Duke of York, etc., while his older brother Arthur will be King of England. You see him at his best when he comes from table where he has eaten well, and orders his page to hand him his flute. With his flute to his little mouth, his curled lip on the stop, his fingers flickering and his eyes delightfully absorbed and intent, as he sits upright in satin doublet, he changes to an artist, not a rapturous Italian artist, but a jolly English one, with melody and sweetness and zest in his nature, fluting for his solace like any shepherd boy on any weald in England.

The boy Francis is most at home with his mother Louise. He is now in 1500 one of those little brown French lads, long as an haricot, already a perfect little gentleman and a perfect little devil, with gay manners, a deftness that will combine with lightning movements and hard daring, a shimmer of words already allowing his mother and little sister to understand how versatile his intelligence is, an intelligence that will be like his own long, discriminating, inquisitive, sensuous nose. He is the idol of his

mother. Francis's sister was conceived at an age not to be mentioned, and born when the mother was fourteen. The boy will sleep in his mother's room until he is that same age. He adores his mother, and counts on her to guide him, to indulge him, to save him, to be God for him, and to see in him the Cæsar worthy of her dreams. He is not in line to be King of France unless the present King die childless. He is Duc d'Angoulême, and his little sister who also worships him is Marguerite d'Angoulême.

The youngest of the three dukes is Charles, a baby in his cradle, who is just opening those vast blue eyes on Ghent. His mother is a Spaniard, his father a blond German-Burgundian, but the language heard around his cradle is French Walloon. This must have been an amazingly placid baby, but already he was probably sleeping with his mouth open and moaning restlessly, not because he is going to be Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire—a trade name for Germany, more or less—but because he has adenoids. He will have the heavy adenoidal chin that Titian and Velasquez will make famous as the Hapsburg-Aragon contribution to human beauty. He is a blond infant, and no one cares for him more than his widowed young aunt, Margaret of Austria, who will be his regent in a few years.

These three dates are worth remembering: Henry born in 1491, Francis in 1495, Charles on that convenient date 1500. And the boys are worth identifying. Henry and Francis will die in the same year, 1547: Charles will outlive them, though not by many years. They are the central European figures of the first half of the sixteenth century, in that walk of life to which it had pleased God to call them, Henry's father having aided God by direct action.

### III

The Europe which these three monarchs were so largely to inherit had not a purely political character. The stream of its politics was merely one influence, one current in the ocean, which was ebbing and flowing under vaster influences, some of them of this earth and others from beyond the earth, uncontrolled by sovereignties that were to call themselves imperial.

It was the world of 1500-1550: Europe opening its astonished gaze on the sea-routes to America, Africa and India; on the

spread of travel, the marvel of ship and compass, the rich harvests of commerce and exchange springing mainly from the enterprise of the mounting middle class; the diversity and violence of humanist criticism, the power of Biblical revelation passing from the priests to the people, from Latin torpor into living common speech; the weakness of the papacy and the strength of kings; the confusion of values, the deep and at the same time terrifying possibilities of mental and spiritual self-assertion, the growing personality and increasing wealth of the 'barbarian' nations, and the keener sweetness of actual life.

This was a Europe in which strong impulse crowded on the heels of new inventions and popularisations, pushing out the boundaries of ambition and the frontiers of habit, and yet carrying into this enlargement of experience, as always happens, much of the attitude and many of the impedimenta of the older art of life. Names hurtle across the bold skies of the early sixteenth century like wild squadrons of the air—Botticelli, Perugino, Mantegna, da Vinci, Albrecht Dürer, Raphael, Michelangelo, Titian, Breughel, Holbein, Cellini, Columbus, Cabot, Vasco da Gama, Cortés, Pizarro, Chevalier Bayard, Gaston de Foix, Gonsalvo de Córdoba, Pescara, Linacre, Ambroise Paré, Servetus, Bernard Palissy, Erasmus, Budé, Colet, Thomas More, Melanchthon, Martin Luther, Rabelais, Ferdinand, Maximilian, Louis XII, the Popes Julius, Leo X, Adrian VI, Clement VII, Isabella, Louise of Savoy, Margaret of Austria, Margaret of the Heptameron, James IV, James V, Charles V, Francis I, Henry VIII, Wolsey, Cranmer, Thomas Cromwell, Machiavelli, Ignatius Loyola, Copernicus, Calvin—a swarm, a whirl, of brilliant and extravagant vitality, that throbbed and danced in the heavens and that, in the glowing distance, still coruscates and blazes fire. It was not the revival of learning, since the reunion of Italy and the classic had already accomplished itself, nor was it a definite renaissance or resurrection, like an act in a play, but it had, outside Spain, the common character of the breakdown of disciplines, an upheaval against the parenthood of the past, a striding insurgence into new plenitudes of experience, and, with this, a subjection to new empires of power.

Europe turned to Italy as Italy had turned to Greece. But it was the Italy of a new beauty and a new truth. The old uni-



versal control was gone and new fidelities proposed themselves through the fitful deliciousness, the immorality of emancipation, that crisped and thrilled men's hearts.

The garden had to have its serpent. A career like Michelangelo's, a single reflective gaze like Leonardo da Vinci's, broke through the Lorenzos and the Lorenzaccios to give back to human beings the mournful search of the infinite beyond the little ecstasy of young hope. But at least it was no longer that early fidelity, that simple obedience of the child. It was the piercing scrutiny of free intelligence, the sun that had been slain and was arisen.

And in the towns, in the little world of the workshops as in the dark recesses of the by-streets, this light, shattered into its prism by twisted window panes, fell in its wonder on the em-bruted and the enslaved. Plants reach for the light: in every nation of this turbulent and palpitating Europe there was that secret quiver in the breathlessness of a fresh experience which is like the glad hidden trembling of first love.

Yet with all this disposition to dethrone the theology that had dominated mature life, with all this zest for happiness that sought to create new hierarchies of value, the field of political authority was left gaping open for the least inspired and least controlled of leaders. Save for Switzerland, Europe at this moment was politically imbecile. It was the direct ancestor of our present Europe, a concert without its director, a blare and clang of lusty sound with immense creative impulse and no exterior design. In 1500-1550 it was on the very threshold of that bloody nationalism which celebrated itself on so large a scale in 1914-1918. The main difference, from an historical point of view, is the more evident dynastic character of 1500-1550. The people of Europe dethroned the Church by a sudden surge of instinct but, except for disputing power in a few peasant risings and a few restless communes, left political control to the hungry dynasts, a narrow and imperious master-class.

The Europe of emperor-pope had proved utterly unable to stretch itself to include the great plural vitalities that were now developing. This old notion and practice of a European society might have survived if the councils of the Church had been extraordinarily flexible and emancipated, but as the Italians had no true interest in Europe, Europe could not group itself around