THE MARRYING OF
ANNE OF CLEVES

Royal protocol in early modern England

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CONTENTS

PLATES

Miniature portrait of Anne of Cleves, 1539. Hans *frontispiece*
Holbein the Younger. Reproduced by permission of the
Trustees of the Victoria &Albert Museum, London
(© V&A Picture Library)

(between pages 80 and 81)

1 Jane Seymour, queen of England. Hans Holbein. Mauritshuis,
   The Hague
2 Henry VIII, king of England. After Hans Holbein. Walker Art
   Gallery, Liverpool
3 Thomas Cromwell, 1st earl of Essex. Hans Holbein. National
   Portrait Gallery, London
4 Francis I, king of France, Jean Clouet. Musée du Louvre, Paris
5 James V and Mary of Guise, king and queen of Scotland.
   Unknown artist. The Devonshire Collection, Hardwick Hall
   (National Trust). Photo: the Courtauld Institute, London
6 Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor. Titian. Museo del Prado,
   Madrid
7 Christina of Denmark, countess of Milan and Lorraine. Hans
   Holbein. National Gallery, London
8 John of Cleves with his brother Adolph at the wedding of Philip
   the Good. Miniature from the *Remissorium Phillippi*. Algemeen
   Rijksarchief, The Hague
9 The six princes of the house of Cleves (from left to right) Adolph
   I, John I, John II, John III, William V, John William. Henrik
   Feltman. Museum of Kurhaus Kleve (Cleves)
10 William of Cleves, 1540. Engraving by Heinrich Aldegrever.
   Stadtmuseum, Düsseldorf

FIGURES

1 ❧ INTRODUCTION

On 6 January 1540 Henry VIII married Anne of Cleves, his fourth wife but only his second foreign-born one, with the goal of siring more male children to secure the succession. It was so expected a practice for a monarch to select a foreign bride, as Henry did in 1509 and 1540, that Erasmus felt it necessary to warn against these unions in *The Education of a Christian Prince*, which was published in 1516. In his work which was composed to provide instruction in political theory to Charles, the future Holy Roman Emperor, and later to Ferdinand, his brother and successor to the empire, this great humanist condemned these marriages because, as he observed, far from ensuring peace between the two lands, they often fostered warfare. Singling out the union of James IV of Scotland and Margaret Tudor in 1503 as an example of their realms' unfulfilled hopes for peace, he inquired: "What was gained a few years ago by the alliance of King James of Scotland since he invaded England with his hostile forces?" Erasmus's advice was the exact opposite of Thomas Hoccleve's, a fifteenth-century writer who also promoted peace. In *The Regement of Princes*, "virtually the first full fledged English manual of instruction for a prince," that was written for the future Henry V in about 1412, Hoccleve recommended wedlock between members of estranged dynasties, giving as an example, a union between Henry and, as it turned out, his future consort, Katherine of France.[1]

It is interesting that Erasmus, who had resided and worked in England, pointed to that kingdom's alliance with Scotland as an example of how dynastic unions, even relatively soon after the exchange of wedding vows, could fail in their peacemaking goals, but it is equally interesting that he omitted reference to the wars the descendants of such marriages waged in their quests for disputed

inheritances. One example of these conflicts was the on-going struggle for control of the duchy of Milan. Both Louis XII and his successor Francis I laid claim to the duchy through the marriage in 1387 of their ancestor, Louis I of Orléans, brother of Charles VI, to Valentina, daughter of Giangaleazzo Visconti, duke of Milan. This genealogical claim to the duchy was at the heart of the recurrent Franco-Imperial wars in the sixteenth century.

Unlike some other humanists, as, for example, John Colet, the unmarried Erasmus was willing to praise the sacrament of marriage, for, as he remarked in this advice book: "He does not die, who leaves a living likeness of himself." Erasmus also wrote a Latin treatise lauding wedlock, which its English translator, Richard Tavener, in 1536 ironically dedicated to Thomas Cromwell, Henry VIII's principal secretary and lord privy seal, who had been a widower for several years. In it the humanist denounced bachelorhood as "both barren and unnatural" and called those who remained single "traiterous murderers" of their lineage. In other tracts, Erasmus lauded individuals who eschewed marriage; for example, he complimented Berta Heyen for remaining faithful to her deceased husband. Even so, some of his work offered a favorable intellectual approach to matrimony.[2]

In England until the passage of Lord Hardwicke's Act of 1753, families were expected to proceed through five stages to conclude marriage: (1) a contract negotiated between parents or guardians of the bride and groom that set out dowry, dower or jointure, and other financial matters and that was delivered at the church door; (2) the spousals or vows to wed sworn in the future tense; (3) the proclamation of the banns three times; (4) the nuptials with vows sworn in the present tense; and (5) sexual consummation.[3] This sequence created the legal family, the basic social, religious, and economic unit of early modern England. The ideal family included a conjugal couple together with any children, wards, and servants they might possess. The wealthiest tended to produce the most children as well as to retain the most servants and wards in their households. At the apex of society, among the aristocracy generally but more especially among ruling dynasties, matrimonial selections were limited, for the overriding issues at stake went far beyond personal decisions based on partner preferences.[4]

Erasmus was essentially correct in that realms did often attempt to

end their estrangements or hostilities through marriage alliances, as, for example, the union between Margaret and James. It was a prevailing ideal that was factored into the arrangement of truces and peace treaties. As David Potter has noted, "The game of marriage negotiations and alliances seemed to make the international system a vast family concern."[5]

The ending of hostilities was an important motive but not the only one for dynastic intermarriage. Unions between already friendly realms might deepen their amicable ties, as, for example, the union in 1537 of James V of Scotland and Madeleine of France, which confirmed the continuation of the "auld alliance."[6] Sometimes the purpose was to establish better relations between countries at peace in order to forge a network against a common enemy. When Henry began to seek a bride in 1537, he informed Sir Thomas Wyatt, his ambassador with Charles V, that he was eager to negotiate alliances with the emperor's relatives for himself, his son Edward, and his two daughters, Mary and Elizabeth. As Charles and Francis were then estranged, these marriages, if they had taken place, would have served to isolate France diplomatically.[7]

In this "patriarchal sociopolitical system," it was usually the daughters who had to leave their homes to wed husbands in strange, sometimes hostile lands.[8] The relatives of these ladies, even when they were friends of the groom's family, expected the brides to send back to their homes information about secret matters of their adopted kingdoms. If the new wives managed to give birth to surviving offspring, attempts would also be made to surround the children with advisors who were favorable to their mothers' native lands. Erasmus expressed concern for the well-being of these brides, who, like Catherine of Aragon when she wed Arthur, prince of Wales, in 1501, were expected to and often did represent their fathers' interests in their adopted homes. They were, he lamented, "sent away unto remote places" and, he suspected, "would be happier if they could live among their own people, even though with less pompous display."[9] Two years before this lamentation appeared in Erasmus's advice book, the emperor's sister, Isabella, complained to their eldest sister Eleanor about her recent marriage to Christian II of Denmark: "It is hard enough to marry a man . . . whom you do not know or love, and worse still to be required to leave home and

kindred, and follow a stranger to the ends of the earth, without even being able to speak his language."[10]

Occasionally, a monarch, like the Habsburg emperor, Maximilian of Austria, grandfather to Charles, married the heiress of another principality, in his case, Mary of Burgundy. In his advice book, Erasmus expressed no concern for husbands like him who might have to reside in alien lands, for the widespread bias was that queens regnant ought to marry foreigners. In 1553 Simon Renard, the Imperial ambassador in England, informed a correspondent that if Queen Mary, who had recently succeeded her half-brother Edward VI, were to wed an Englishman, "her posterity would not have as much renown as if her husband were a foreign prince capable of assisting and protecting her." If she married one of her subjects, the danger existed that by favoring his family, she would plunge the country into civil war.[11]

In an article in the *American Historical Review* concerning Habsburg marriages, Paula Fichtner argued that marital alliances between foreign realms constituted useful diplomatic gestures because they provided a way of expressing the rule of reciprocity in international relations. The marriage established "a foundation in joint obligation" without which treaties could not be promulgated or maintained. A significant factor in these arrangements was the gift exchange by which the parties incurred obligations to each other. In the discussions leading to the agreements, much time and attention were consumed with questions of jointures, dowries, inheritances of estates, and the future possession of territories by any children produced by the unions. Often, as in the case of the Habsburg marriages, both parties contributed about equally in terms of wealth, in lands, money, or jewels, with the bridegroom's family offering more in the way of lands than cash; however, political advantage could take the place of wealth. In 1559 Charles of Austria, son of Emperor Ferdinand I, for example, was willing to forgo a dowry from Elizabeth I in exchange for permission to inherit England in the event he should survive her. Ultimately, as Fichtner argued, these unions were incapable of establishing perpetual friendly relations. Treaties failed because they were inadequate to meet the needs of the parties involved or because those needs changed over time. In the final analysis, a marriage was not strong enough to overcome the weaknesses inherent in the treaties themselves.[12]

The mutual obligation established through gift exchanges was significant, but dynasties were also alert to the possibility of extending their control over other territories through these arrangements. Claims to ancestors' principalities, as, for example, the duchy of Milan, could be the immediate excuse for aggression. The Habsburg success in utilizing these genealogical claims to obtain lands encouraged others to seek unions for their children with foreign dynasties. Ironically, the phrase, *Bella gerant alii, tu, felix Austria, nube. Nam quae Mars aliis, dat tibi regna Venus* [Let the strong fight wars. Thou happy Austria marry. What Mars bestows on others, Venus gives to thee], which refers to the method the Habsburgs used to expand their presence in Europe, was coined in 1477 by King Matthias Corvinus of Hungary, who actually intended to mock their military incompetence, not to celebrate their marital strategies. It stands, however, as an accurate description of how they achieved their dynastic advantages in the bedchamber.[13]

Charles, the prince whom Erasmus futilely advised to wed one of his subjects, was the most obvious benefactor of Habsburg alliances. By wedding Mary of Burgundy, Charles's paternal grandfather Maximilian had brought his family and Austria one step closer toward European domination through control of that wealthy duchy. Next, Charles's father Philip the Fair, the heir of Burgundy, had married Juana, heiress of Spain; Charles ultimately gained personal charge of his mother's kingdom and its overseas possessions when he became regent for her in 1516 after the death of her father Ferdinand. On the British Isles, a smaller version of the Habsburg strategy was played out in the early seventeenth century when James VI, the great-grandson of Margaret Tudor and James IV, the union that Erasmus had so deplored because it had not preserved peace between their realms, ascended the throne of England as James I.

In contrast, Henry VIII's principal purpose in marrying for a fourth time in 1540 was neither aggrandizement of the realm nor peacemaking. In 1527 he had compared his dynasty's territorial needs with those of the Habsburgs:

Formerly, the House of Burgundy only possessed Flanders, and now the Emperor has many lands and kingdoms spread all over the surface of the earth. He [Henry VIII] had not increased his father's inheritance; he had only one kingdom, small in size, it was true, but so surrounded by sea that he needed no help from anyone.[14]

HENRY VII
b.1457
d.1509
m.
Elizabeth of York
b.1465
d.1503

Arthur
b.1486
d.1502
m.
Catherine
of Aragon
o

HENRY VIII
b.1491
d.1547
m.

Catherine
of Aragon
b.1485
d.1536

Anne Boleyn
b.1507
x 1536

Jane
Seymour
b.1509
d.1537

Anne of
Cleves
b.1515
d.1557

Catherine
Howard
x 1542

Catherine
Parr
b.1512
d.1548

MARY
b.1516
d.1558
m.
Philip
of Spain
o

ELIZABETH
b.1533
d.1603
o

EDWARD VI
b.1537
d.1553
o

Margaret
b.1489
d.1541
m.

James IV
(Stuart)
b.1473
† 1513

Archibald Douglas
earl of Angus
b.1489
d.1557

James V
d.1512
d.1542
m.
Mary of
Guise

Margaret
b.1516
d.1578
m.
Matthew Stuart
earl of Lennox
b.1516
d.1571

Mary   m.   Henry Stuart
Queen of Scots   earl of Darnley
b.1542   b.1545
x 1578   d.1567

JAMES VI and I
b.1566
d.1625

Charles
earl of Lennox
d.1576

Arabella Stuart
b.1575
d.1615

Mary
b.1496
d.1533
m.

Louis XII

Charles Brandon
duke of Suffolk
d.1545

Frances Brandon
m.
Henry Guy
duke of Suffolk
x 1554

Jane
b.1537
x 1554
m.
Guildford
Darnley
x 1554
o

Catherine
m.
Edward Seymour
earl of Hertford
b.1539
d.1621

Arabella Stuart ...... m. ...... William Seymour
b.1575   duke of Somerset
d.1615   b.1588
o   d.1660

x = executed
† = killed in battle
o = line closed
CAPITALS = king or queen of England
Italic = foreign king or queen

Figure 1 The House of Tudor. G. R. Elton, England under the Tudors (New York, 1991)

His desire for another wife was rooted in his determination to secure the Tudor succession. He and other monarchs viewed their kingdoms as family trusts to be handed down to the next generation, preferably to their legitimate sons. In 1603 James I, for example, remarked of his heir Henry: "He was not ours only, as a child of a natural father; but as an heir apparent to our body politic, in whom our estate and kingdoms are especially interested." Earlier, in 1568, Zachariah, Cardinal Delphino, had tried to persuade Charles of Austria to marry Elizabeth I with the warning that if he failed to do so, there would be "no want of persons to believe" that he had "forfeited" for himself and his "blood, both born and unborn, that great fortune, great glory and great profit and name which by all rights would have fallen on your highness and yours."[15]

Ultimately, this concern for the dynasty's continuation was the single most important reason for royal marriages. In 1553 Queen Mary confided to the Spanish ambassador that as a "private individual" who was thirty-seven-years old, she would have preferred to "end her days in chastity," but as she had ascended the throne and had assumed the responsibility of a "public position," it was her responsibility to marry.[16] By contrast, in 1539 her first cousin Emperor Charles had declined to remarry after the death of his consort, Isabella of Portugal. He rejected the suggestions of Alessandro, Cardinal Farnese, and Juan Fernandez Manrique, marquis de Aguilar, that he wed the youthful Margaret of France to cement his newly ratified French treaty with the explanation that he had a son and daughters and ought to think of them rather than of himself. Furthermore, he continued, in a sense accepting Hoccleve's earlier recommendation, he hoped for many unions between his progeny and members of the French ruling family to ensure the permanence of their peace. Throughout his life, by deeds and words, he consistently rejected Erasmus's advice against the intermarriage of foreign dynasties.[17]

Henry was not blessed with many legitimate offspring, for his two daughters, Mary and Elizabeth, had been declared illegitimate after he was divorced from their mothers in 1533 and 1536, respectively. His only legitimate child was Edward, born in 1537 to his third consort Jane, who died in childbed of puerperal fever. As Henry's elder brother Arthur had died prematurely in 1502, the king was personally aware of the slender hold his family had on the throne. In

fact, Mark Hansen has determined that the expected life of a Tudor male was 10.3 years at birth and 28 years at adolescence. The expected life of a Tudor female was not much better: 18 years at birth and 28 years at adolescence. Only one-third of the Tudor offspring in the sixteenth century survived through infancy while one-half of those of the Habsburg family actually lived to reproduce themselves.[18] "More store of lawful posterity," as Henry, himself hoped for in 1539, would provide some greater assurance for his line's continuation and could be a useful pawn in marriage negotiations either in England or abroad. The first priority was the birth of another son to more firmly secure the succession, after which the birth of daughters and other sons would be welcome to cement marriage treaties.[19]

In 1540 the king selected as his wife Anne, the sister of William, duke of Cleves, from among Christendom's noble families, for diplomatic reasons at a time of religious turmoil. By early 1539 a rapprochement between Charles and Francis, as well as the renewal by Pope Paul III of the suspended bull of excommunication against Henry, had left England isolated. In retaliation and needing to marry to secure the succession, he decided to form an anti-papal network with William of Cleves, a schismatic ruler who was, like himself, neither Lutheran nor sacramentarian. Anticipating by this action a future when leaders would have to acknowledge that Christendom was permanently divided, Henry would have readily accepted the intent of a comment made by an onlooker in 1655 about the union of Philip IV and Mariana of Austria: "God give them blessed sons for the sake of Spain, the defence of the faith and above all, for peace."[20]

It is principally the sheer number of Henry's wives, six in all, that has caused the events of his reign, especially the domestic dramas, to be viewed as idiosyncratic, as though they were not in step with contemporary political and social customs. This is an unfortunate development, for it is necessary, in order to gain a fuller understanding of his reign, that his marriages be interpreted by the standards of prevailing cultural norms to determine whether they actually fell within the range of what might be termed as acceptable protocol. The most unusual attribute of his marriages might well turn out to be simply that there were so many of them, for the characteristics of each have contemporary and historical precedents and justifications. Although it was unusual for a king to divorce one wife, let alone four, or to have
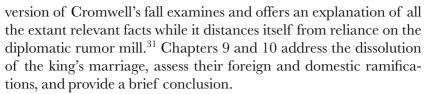
one executed, let alone two, the events surrounding those actions and other marital events should not automatically be dismissed as idiosyncratic.[21]

For the most part, in assessing the marrying of Anne of Cleves and Henry, only the protocol of royal unions will be examined since they have important attributes that set them apart from the practices of the English nobility.[22] The events leading to dynastic unions, including their public and private trappings, offer insights into the relationships of ruling families to each other as well as domestically to their powerful subjects. These marital alliances, which drew upon royal ceremonial rights and privileges, functioned as a "visible assertion" of their "preeminence" over their nobility and offered a sign of their growing social and political domination within their kingdoms.[23] Malcolm Vale has commented on this trend in military matters: "The fraternity of knights, regarding each other as brothers-in-arms, seems to have increasingly given way during the fifteenth century to an association acting under a sovereign."[24] The symbols of power that helped to sustain and mark this dominance were those of increasingly elaborate ceremony and pageantry: both extravagant public festivals and tournaments and less publicized ritual and protocol.[25]

Johan Huizinga's long accepted view that by the fifteenth century chivalry had degenerated into mere lavish displays while its essence, its knightly spirit, and its integrity had disappeared is no longer central to studies on this topic.[26] Scholars, such as Maurice Keen and Larry Benson, have interpreted these changes more positively as dynamic cultural developments rather than as decadence.[27] In the sixteenth century, the chivalric code of honor that extolled politeness toward women, devotion to the church, hospitality, generosity, and the individual quest for glory still resided at the core of aristocratic ideals. In hindsight, Henry,[28] Charles, and Francis, the three rulers who dominated early-sixteenth-century diplomacy, might appear to have been self-centered, greedy, grasping, and cruel, but their contemporaries believed, as Steven Gunn has observed, that they were chivalric kings aspiring to be the perfect knight. David Potter has further elaborated: They seemed "to have viewed the world around them in terms of a princely sporting event in which they engaged in personal combat with their royal competition to vindicate their honour and glory."[29]

This study of the marrying of Henry and Anne contains ten chapters. Following this introduction, Chapter 2 looks at the royal ministers, diplomatic corps, and other officials who were called upon to negotiate marriage treaties. Like diplomacy, courtship required "tact and subtlety" because its success depended "upon the appearance of sincerity" that was often "carefully calculated." As most monarchs, like Henry in 1537–40, were unable to woo their foreign brides personally, a survey of their agents at home and abroad is essential to an understanding of the marrying process. A discussion of the validity of their dispatches as evidence for court politics and events also forms a important part of this study.[30] Chapter 3 follows Henry's futile search for a bride in France and the empire in 1537–39; the candidates who were considered worthy of the queenship are identified and the reasons for the failure of his courtship of them is highlighted. In addition, attention is paid to the monarchs' strategies to make more palatable the requirement that they sometimes were required to wed brides with whom they were unacquainted. Chapters 4 through 7, which focus more narrowly on the Cleves alliance, examine the preliminary deliberations with Duke William, including an overview of religious turmoil, and provide a discussion of Hans Holbein the Younger's controversial portrait of Anne. They next detail her journey to England, her private meeting with the king at Rochester, and the wedding at Greenwich. Chapter 8 considers the reasons for the short duration of their marriage and for the fall of Cromwell. Instead of perpetuating the view that Thomas, third duke of Norfolk, and Stephen Gardiner, bishop of Winchester, led a conservative religious faction that effected the political ruin of Cromwell and his faction of religious reformers, this chapter argues that he suffered as the scapegoat for the king's inability to consummate the union with his bride. Church scholars had long believed that witches caused relative impotency, which they defined as an incapacity toward one woman, the affliction that Henry presumably suffered with Anne. Anyone who was associated, however innocently, with individuals such as Walter, Lord Hungerford of Heytesbury, who was accused of employing these allegedly demonic creatures, also came under suspicion. Hungerford and his patron, Cromwell, were executed on the same day at the Tower of London and their heads were placed together on London bridge as a warning to observers to refrain from meddling in treasonable activities. This

version of Cromwell's fall examines and offers an explanation of all the extant relevant facts while it distances itself from reliance on the diplomatic rumor mill.[31] Chapters 9 and 10 address the dissolution of the king's marriage, assess their foreign and domestic ramifications, and provide a brief conclusion.

This is neither a biography of Anne nor of Henry; it is an account of his quest for a fourth wife that culminated in his failed marriage to her. It examines his marrying behavior and strategies for the purpose of relating them to the expected royal protocol and practices of early modern England. Material from the courtship and marriages of other monarchs, often from foreign dynasties, will provide a contextual framework for the study. Attempts will be made to indicate when wooing and wedding practices emerged and whether and how by the end of the seventeenth century they had been altered. This does not pretend to be a comprehensive study of early modern courtship;[32] only enough evidence, some of it substantial, will be offered to provide a window into marrying customs and thereby to provide a fuller understanding of the reasons for the making and breaking of Henry's fourth marriage.