

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-01911-8 - *Memoirs of the Court of Queen Elizabeth*, Volume 1

Lucy Aikin

Excerpt

[More information](#)

MEMOIRS

OF

The Court of Queen Elizabeth.

CHAPTER I.

1533 TO 1536.

Birth of Elizabeth.—Circumstances attending the marriage of her parents.—Public entry of Anne Boleyn into London.—Pageants exhibited.—Baptism of Elizabeth.—Eminent persons present.—Proposal of marriage between Elizabeth and a French prince.—Progress of the reformation.—Henry persecutes both parties.—Death of Catherine of Arragon.—Disgrace of Anne Boleyn.—Her death.—Confesses an obstacle to her marriage.—Particulars on this subject.—Elizabeth declared illegitimate.—Letter of lady Bryan respecting her.—The king marries Jane Seymour.

ON the 7th of September 1533, at the royal palace of Greenwich in Kent, was born, under circumstances as peculiar as her after-life proved eventful and illustrious, ELIZABETH daughter of king Henry VIII. and his queen Anne Boleyn.

Delays and difficulties equally grievous to the impetuous temper of the man and the despotic habits of the prince, had for years obstructed Henry in the execution of his favourite project of repudiating, on the

VOL. I.

B

plea

2

plea of their too near alliance, a wife who had ceased to find favor in his sight, and substituting on her throne the youthful beauty who had captivated his imagination. At length his passion and his impatience had arrived at a pitch capable of bearing down every obstacle. With that contempt of decorum which he displayed so remarkably in some former, and many later transactions of his life, he caused his private marriage with Anne Boleyn to precede the sentence of divorce which he had resolved that his clergy should pronounce against Catherine of Arragon; and no sooner had this judicial ceremony taken place, than the new queen was openly exhibited as such in the face of the court and the nation.

An unusual ostentation of magnificence appears to have attended the celebration of these august nuptials. The fondness of the king for pomp and pageantry was at all times excessive, and on this occasion his love and his pride would equally conspire to prompt an extraordinary display. Anne, too, a vain, ambitious, and light-minded woman, was probably greedy of this kind of homage from her princely lover; and the very consciousness of the dubious, inauspicious, or disgraceful circumstances attending their union, might secretly augment the anxiety of the royal pair to dazzle and impose by the magnificence of their public appearance. Only once before, since the Norman conquest, had a king of England stooped from his dignity to elevate a private gentlewoman and a subject to a partnership of his bed and throne; and the bitter animosities between the queen's relations on one side,
and

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-01911-8 - *Memoirs of the Court of Queen Elizabeth*, Volume 1

Lucy Aikin

Excerpt

[More information](#)

3

and the princes of the blood and great nobles on the other, which had agitated the reign of Edward IV., and contributed to bring destruction on the heads of his helpless orphans, stood as a strong warning against a repetition of the experiment.

The unblemished reputation and amiable character of Henry's "some-time wife," had long procured for her the love and respect of the people; her late misfortunes had engaged their sympathy, and it might be feared that several unfavorable points of comparison would suggest themselves between the high-born and high-minded Catherine and her present rival—once her humble attendant—whose long-known favor with the king, whose open association with him at Calais, whither she had attended him, whose private marriage of uncertain date, and already advanced pregnancy, afforded so much ground for whispered censures.

On the other hand, the personal qualities of the king gave him great power over popular opinion. The manly beauty of his countenance, the strength and agility which in the chivalrous exercises of the time rendered him victorious over all competitors; the splendor with which he surrounded himself; his bounty; the popular frankness of his manners, all conspired to render him, at this period of his life, an object of admiration rather than of dread to his subjects; while the respect entertained for his talents and learning, and for the conscientious scruples respecting his first marriage which he felt or feigned, mingled so much of deference in their feelings towards him, as to check all hasty censures of his conduct. The protestant

B 2

party,

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-01911-8 - *Memoirs of the Court of Queen Elizabeth*, Volume 1

Lucy Aikin

Excerpt

[More information](#)

4

party, now considerable by zeal and numbers, foresaw too many happy results to their cause from the circumstances of his present union, to scrutinize with severity the motives which had produced it. The nation at large, justly dreading a disputed succession. with all its long-experienced evils, in the event of Henry's leaving behind him no offspring but a daughter whom he had lately set aside on the ground of illegitimacy, rejoiced in the prospect of a male heir to the crown. The populace of London, captivated, as usual, by the splendors of a coronation, were also delighted with the youth, beauty, and affability of the new queen.

The solemn entry therefore of Anne into the city of London was greeted by the applause of the multitude; and it was probably the genuine voice of public feeling, which, in saluting her queen of England, wished her, how much in vain! a long and prosperous life.

The pageants displayed in the streets of London on this joyful occasion, are described with much minuteness by our chroniclers, and afford ample indications that the barbarism of taste which permitted an incongruous mixture of classical mythology with scriptural allusions, was at its height in the learned reign of our eighth Henry. Helicon and Mount Parnassus appeared on one side; St. Anne, and 'Mary the wife of Cleophas with her children, were represented on the other. Here the three Graces presented the queen with a golden apple by the hands of their orator Mercury; there the four cardinal Virtues promised, in set speeches, that they would always be aiding and comforting to her.

On

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-01911-8 - *Memoirs of the Court of Queen Elizabeth*, Volume 1

Lucy Aikin

Excerpt

[More information](#)

5

On the Sunday after her public entry, a day not at this period regarded as improper for the performance of such a ceremonial, Henry caused his queen to be crowned at Westminster with great solemnity; an honor which he never thought proper to confer on any of her successors.

In the sex of the child born to them a few months afterwards, the hopes of the royal pair must doubtless have sustained a severe disappointment: but of this sentiment nothing was suffered to appear in the treatment of the infant, whom her father was anxious to mark out as his only legitimate offspring and undoubted heir to the crown.

She was destined to bear the auspicious name of Elizabeth, in memory of her grandmother, that heiress of the house of York whose marriage with the earl of Richmond, then Henry VII., had united the roses, and given lasting peace to a country so long rent by civil discord. The unfortunate Mary, now in her sixteenth year, was stripped of the title of princess of Wales, which she had borne from her childhood, that it might adorn a younger sister; one too whose birth her interest, her religion, and her filial affection for an injured mother, alike taught her to regard as base and infamous.

A public and princely christening served still further to attest the importance attached to this new member of the royal family.

By the king's special command, Cranmer archbishop of Canterbury stood godfather to the princess; and Shakespeare, by a fiction equally poetical and courtly, has represented him as breaking forth on this memorable

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-01911-8 - Memoirs of the Court of Queen Elizabeth, Volume 1

Lucy Aikin

Excerpt

[More information](#)

6

memorable occasion into an animated vaticination of the glories of the “maiden reign.” Happy was it for the peace of mind of the noble personages there assembled, that no prophet was empowered at the same time to declare how few of them should live to share its splendors; how awfully large a proportion of their number should fall, or behold their nearest connexions falling, untimely victims of the jealous tyranny of Henry himself, or of the convulsions and persecutions of the two troubled reigns destined to intervene before those halcyon days which they were taught to anticipate!

For the purpose of illustrating the truth of this remark, and at the same time of introducing to the reader the most distinguished personages of Henry’s court, several of whom will afterwards be found exerting different degrees of influence on the character or fortunes of the illustrious subject of this work, it may be worth while to enumerate in regular order the performers in this august ceremonial. The circumstantial Holinshed, to whom we are indebted for their names and offices, will at the same time furnish some of those minute particulars which serve to bring the whole pompous scene before the eye of fancy.

Early in the afternoon, the lord-mayor and corporation of London, who had been summoned to attend, took boat for Greenwich, where they found many lords, knights, and gentlemen assembled. The whole way from the palace to the friery was strown with green rushes, and the walls were hung with tapestry, as was the Friars’ church in which the ceremony was performed.

A silver

7

A silver font with a crimson canopy was placed in the middle of the church; and the child being brought into the hall, the long procession set forward. It began with citizens walking two-and-two, and ended with barons, bishops, and earls. Then came, bearing the gilt basins, Henry earl of Essex, the last of the ancient name of Bouchier who bore the title. He was a splendid nobleman, distinguished in the martial games and gorgeous pageantries which then amused the court: he also boasted of a royal lineage, being sprung from Thomas of Woodstock, youngest son of Edward III.; and perhaps he was apprehensive lest this distinction might hereafter become as fatal to himself as it had lately proved to the unfortunate duke of Buckingham. But he perished a few years after by a fall from his horse; and leaving no male issue, the king, to the disgust of this great family, conferred the title on the low-bred Cromwel, then his favorite minister.

The salt was borne by Henry marquis of Dorset, the unfortunate father of lady Jane Grey; who, after receiving the royal pardon for his share in the criminal plot for setting the crown on the head of his daughter, again took up arms in the rebellion of Wyatt, and was brought to expiate this treason on the scaffold.

William Courtney marquis of Exeter followed with the taper of virgin wax; a nobleman who had the misfortune to be very nearly allied to the English throne; his mother being a daughter of Edward IV. He was at this time in high favor with the king his cousin, who, after setting aside his daughter Mary, had even

8

even declared him heir-apparent, to the prejudice of his own sisters: but three years after he fell a victim to the jealousy of the king, on a charge of corresponding with his proscribed kinsman cardinal Pole: his honors and estates were forfeited; and his son, though still a child, was detained in close custody.

The chrism was borne by lady Mary Howard, the beautiful daughter of the duke of Norfolk; who lived not only to behold, but, by the evidence which she gave on his trial, to assist in the most unmerited condemnation of her brother, the gallant and accomplished earl of Surry. The king, by a trait of royal arrogance, selected this lady, descended from our Saxon monarchs and allied to all the first nobility, for the wife of his base-born son created duke of Richmond; but it does not appear that the spirit of the Howards was high enough in this reign to feel the insult as it deserved.

The royal infant, wrapped in a mantle of purple velvet, having a long train furred with ermine, was carried by one of her godmothers, the dowager-duchess of Norfolk. Anne Boleyn was this lady's step-granddaughter: but in this alliance with royalty she had little cause to exult; still less in the closer one which was afterwards formed for her by the elevation of her own grand-daughter Catherine Howard. On discovery of the ill conduct of this queen, the aged duchess was overwhelmed with disgrace; she was even declared guilty of misprision of treason, and committed to custody, but was released by the king after the blood of Catherine and her paramours had quenched his fury.

The dowager-marchioness of Dorset was the other
godmother

9

godmother at the font:—of the four sons of this lady, three perished on the scaffold; her grand-daughter lady Jane Grey shared the same fate; and the surviving son died a prisoner during the reign of Elizabeth, for the offence of distributing a pamphlet asserting the title of the Suffolk line to the crown.

The marchioness of Exeter was the godmother at the confirmation, who had not only the affliction to see her husband brought to an untimely end, and her only son wasting his youth in captivity, but, being herself attainted of high treason some time afterwards, underwent a long and arbitrary imprisonment.

On either hand of the duchess of Norfolk walked the dukes of Norfolk and Suffolk, the only nobles of that rank then existing in England.

Their names occur in conjunction on every public occasion, and in almost every important transaction, civil and military, of the reign of Henry VIII., but the termination of their respective careers was strongly contrasted. The duke of Suffolk had the extraordinary good fortune never to lose that favor with his master which he had gained as Charles Brandon, the partner of his youthful pleasures. What was a still more extraordinary instance of felicity, his marriage with the king's sister brought to him neither misfortunes nor perils, and he did not live to witness those which overtook his grand-daughters. He died in peace, lamented by a sovereign who knew his worth.

The duke of Norfolk, on the contrary, was powerful enough by birth and connexions to impress Henry with fears for the tranquillity of his son's reign. The
memory

10

memory of former services was sacrificed to present alarm. Almost with his last breath he ordered his old and faithful servant to the scaffold; but even Henry was no longer absolute on his death-bed. For once he was disobeyed, and Norfolk survived him; but the long years of his succeeding captivity were poorly compensated by a brief and tardy restoration to liberty and honors under Mary.

One of the child's train-bearers was the countess of Kent. This was probably the widow of the second earl of that title and of the name of Grey: she must therefore have been the daughter of the earl of Pembroke, a zealous Yorkist who was slain fighting in the cause of Edward IV. Henry VIII. was doubtless aware that his best hereditary title to the crown was derived from his mother, and during his reign the Yorkist families enjoyed at least an equal share of favor with the Lancastrians, whom his father had almost exclusively countenanced.

Thomas Boleyn earl of Wiltshire, the proud and happy grandfather of the princely infant, supported the train on one side. It is not true that he afterwards, in his capacity of a privy councillor, pronounced sentence of death on his own son and daughter; even Henry was not inhuman enough to exact this of him; but he lived to witness their cruel and disgraceful end, and died long before the prosperous days of his illustrious grandchild.

On the other side the train was borne by Edward Stanley third earl of Derby. This young nobleman had been a ward of Wolsey, and was carefully educated
by