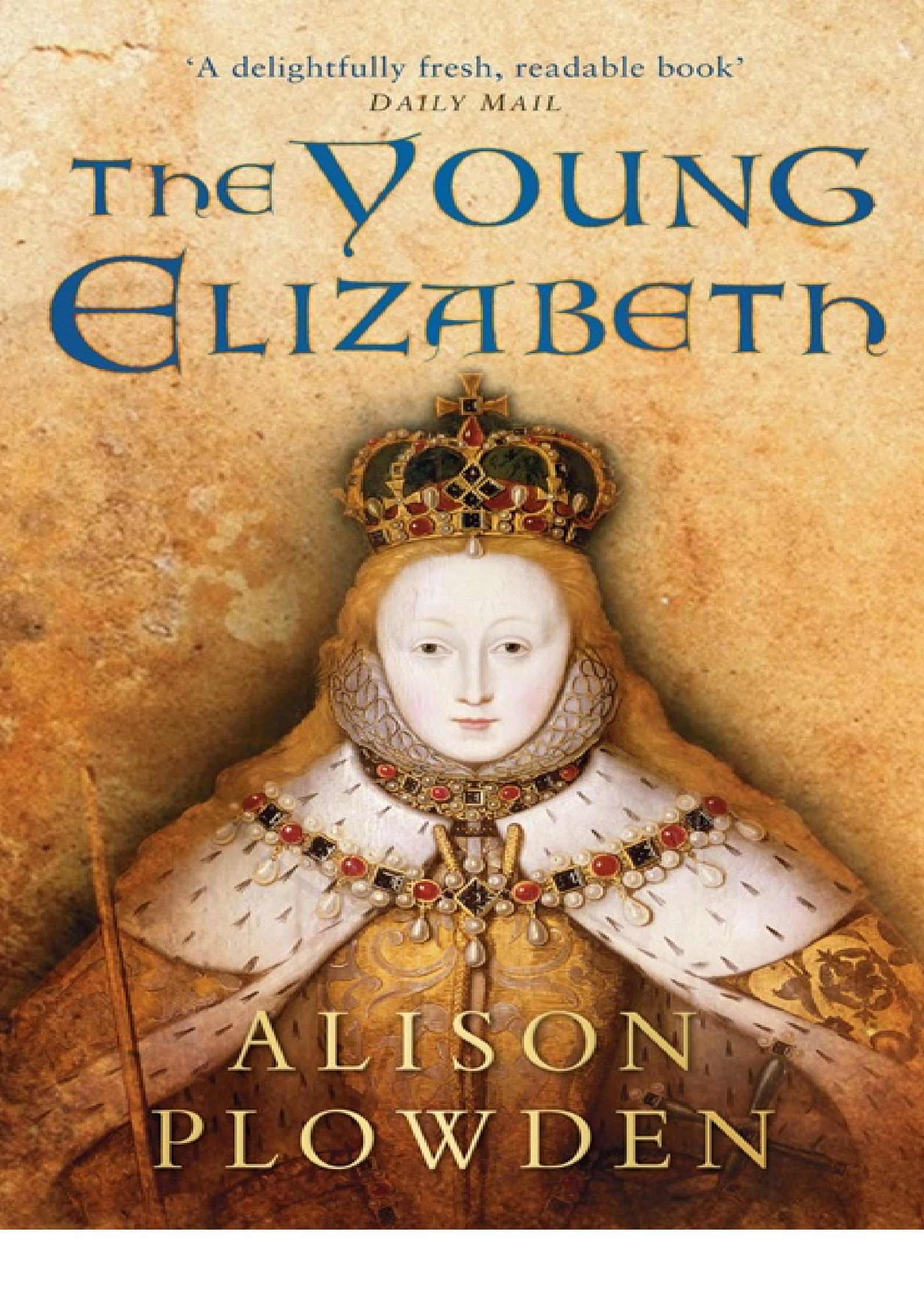


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THE YOUNG ELIZABETH



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PLOWDEN

ALISON PLOWDEN was born in India and was formerly a script writer and editor for the BBC. Her television credits include *Mistress of Hardwick*, for which she won a Writers Guild Award. She is the author of many successful historical books including *The House of Tudor*, acclaimed by the great historian A.L. Rowse as 'Simply excellent on every count ... impossible to fault in scholarship or writing'. This has recently been re-published by Sutton, where it joins others of her works, including *Two Queens in One Isle: The Deadly Relationship of Elizabeth and Mary Queen of Scots, Tudor Women, The Stuart Princesses* and *Women all on Fire: The Women of the English Civil War*. Alison Plowden lives near Wantage in Oxfordshire.

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THE YOUNG
ELIZABETH

ALISON
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The
History
Press

*To Joe Burroughs
In Happy and Grateful Memory*

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Prologue

AT three o'clock in the afternoon of Thursday, 29 May 1533, Queen Anne Boleyn, Marquess of Pembroke, 'most dear and well-beloved' wife of Henry VIII, embarked at Greenwich for the journey up-river to the Tower at the beginning of her coronation celebrations. She was escorted by an impressive contingent of the nobility and by the Lord Mayor and Aldermen, with all the crafts of the City of London in barges sumptuously decorated with banners and streamers and cloth of gold, and plentifully supplied with bands of musicians 'making great melody'.¹ According to one awed foreign spectator, there were so many boats and barges, and so many ladies and gentlemen that it was a thing to wonder at. He added that, although it was four English miles from Greenwich to London and the river was quite wide, nothing else could be seen all the way but boats and barges draped with awnings and carpeted. On arrival at the Tower, the Queen was greeted by a salvo of more than a thousand guns so that it seemed to the same foreigner 'verily as if the world was coming to an end'.² In fact, such was the gunners' enthusiasm, that not a single pane of glass survived either in the Tower or neighbouring St Katherine's.

On Saturday, the thirty-first, came the recognition procession through the City to Westminster, and no expense had been spared to make it a memorable occasion. The great cavalcade, shimmering with gold and crimson, silver and purple and scarlet, wound its way through freshly gravelled and gaily decorated streets. The Queen herself, dressed in white cloth of tissue and 'sitting in her chair' as one observer put it, rode in a litter of white cloth of gold drawn by two palfreys caparisoned to the ground in white damask. At every point of vantage along the route pageants and tableaux were presented and children spoke carefully rehearsed pieces in welcome and praise, and all afternoon the conduits and fountains ran with wine.

The climax of splendour was reached on the following day, Whitsunday, with the coronation ceremony itself when

Queen Anne was brought from Westminster Hall to the Abbey of St Peter's with procession, all the monks of Westminster going in rich copes of gold with thirteen abbots mitred; and after them all the King's Chapel in rich copes with four bishops and two archbishops mitred, and all the Lords going in their Parliament robes, and the crown borne afore her by the Duke of Suffolk, and her two sceptres by two Earls, and she herself going under a rich canopy of cloth of gold, apparelled in a kirtle of crimson velvet powdered with ermines and a robe of purple velvet furred with powdered ermines over that, and a rich coronet with a caul of pearls and stones on her head, and the old Duchess of Norfolk bearing up her train, and the Queen's Chamberlain staying the train in the midst.³

In the Abbey itself, set in her 'seat royal' before the high altar, Anne Boleyn was anointed and crowned Queen of England by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, 'and so sat crowned in her seat royal all the Mass and offered also at the said Mass'. Afterwards, at the banquet in Westminster Hall, she occupied the place of honour at the high table under the Cloth of Estate, served by the nobility of England, while the minstrels made 'goodly sweet harmony' in the background and the King looked on from a place which he had had made from which he could see without being seen.

This was Anne's moment of triumph – a moment which for six years she had worked and schemed to bring about, conducting a dangerous and difficult campaign with cold-blooded courage, tenacity and skill. It only needed now for the child she was so visibly carrying to be a healthy boy and he

tremendous gamble – a gamble which had brought the former maid-of-honour to the second highest place in the land – would finally have paid off beyond all possibility of doubt.

A Gentleman of Wales

THE story of Elizabeth Tudor began just over a hundred years before she was born. It began with a love story – with the romance of a young widowed queen and ‘a gentleman of Wales’.

Katherine of Valois, called ‘the Fair’, daughter of the King of France, had been married to the notable warrior, King Henry V of England, hero of Agincourt, in June 1420 – a marriage designed to seal the Treaty of Troyes which was to inaugurate ‘perpetual peace’ between the two countries. Two years later, on the last day of August 1422, Henry died of dysentery at the Castle of Vincennes just outside Paris. Katherine became a widow shortly before her twenty-first birthday, and her son, ‘Harry born at Windsor’ who was destined to lose all the glory his father had gained, became King Henry VI at the age of nine months.

The youthful Queen Dowager, stranded in a foreign country and probably both bored and lonely, presently found diversion with one of the gentlemen of her household, Owen Tudor, her Welsh Clerk of the Wardrobe. ‘Following more her appetite than friendly counsel and regarding more her private affections than her open honour’, as the chronicler Edward Hall put it. Understandably perhaps, for Owen is described by Polydore Vergil as being ‘adorned with wonderful gifts of body and mind’, and by Hall as ‘a goodly gentleman and a beautiful person garnished with many godly gifts both of nature and of graces’. Another (earlier) chronicle was less complimentary, referring to him tersely as a man of neither birth nor livelihood.

Years later, Owen’s grandson, the first Tudor king, was to be somewhat embarrassed by certain ‘reproachful and slanderous assertions’ about the deficiencies of his pedigree, and felt it necessary to appoint a commission consisting of the Abbot of Valle Crucis, Doctor Owen Poole, canon of Hereford and John King, herald, to enquire into the matter. After visiting Wales and consulting the bards and other authorities, these seekers after knowledge drew up their masters ‘perfect genelogie’ from the ancient Kings of Britain and Princes of Wales. The Tudors, they said, could prove lineal descent by issue male, saving one woman (an artistic touch), from Brute the Trojan – mythical first King of the Britons, who was supposed to have given his name to the land.

In actual fact, however, the founder of the family fortunes appears to have been Ednyfed Fychan who served the rulers of Gwynedd – the principality of North Wales – as seneschal or steward, from approximately 1215 to his death in 1246. Ednyfed was evidently highly thought of by his employers for they rewarded him with extensive grants of land in Anglesey and Caernarvon. He also acquired estates in West Wales, and he and his relatives were allowed the unusual privilege of holding the lands free from restriction, excepting homage and military service in time of war.

The conquest and subjugation of Wales by England in 1282 does not seem to have adversely affected Ednyfed’s descendants. On the contrary, by the middle of the next century, the seneschal’s great-great-grandson, Tudurap Goronwy, had emerged as a considerable landowner. Like a number of other Welsh magnates, he probably supported the English crown and Goronwy, eldest of his five sons, served with the army in France. It was the unsuccessful revolt of Owen Glendower in the early 1400s which brought about the family’s downfall. Through their mother, Tudur’s sons were first cousins to Glendower. Old loyalties reasserted themselves and the remaining four brothers (Goronwy had died in 1382) threw in their lot with the rebel chieftain. The consequences were disastrous. Rhys, the middle brother, was executed in 1412 and all the family estates were confiscated; though the property

Penmyndd in Anglesey was later returned to Goronwy's heirs.¹

Owen Tudor was the son of Maredudd, youngest of the brothers, who held some office under the Bishop of Bangor and was escheator of Anglesey. He was born most probably some time in 1400 and despite the ill-judged activities of his relations later contrived to enter the English royal service. It is not known exactly how or when this happened, although he may have followed Glendower's son, who was officially pardoned in 1417 and became a Squire of the Body to Henry V. There is no evidence to support the tradition that Owen was present at the battle of Agincourt, but he may have been in France in 1421 on the staff of the distinguished soldier and diplomat Sir Walter Hungerford. Sir Walter was one of the executors of Henry V's will and in 1424 became steward to the infant Henry VI, so it is at least possible that he was the means of finding the promising young Welshman a job in the Queen's household.²

The circumstances surrounding Owen's courtship of the Queen Dowager are unfortunately obscure. As Clerk of the Wardrobe, his duties would have included guarding Katherine's jewels and buying and paying for the materials for her dresses – duties which no doubt provided plenty of opportunity for them to get acquainted. It is said that on one occasion he was called upon to dance before the Queen and her ladies. He overbalanced and fell into Katherine's lap, and her reaction to this familiarity led the onlookers to suspect there was something between them.

No record survives of when or where they were married; but, as Katherine bore her second husband three sons and one, possibly two, daughters before her death in 1437 and their legitimacy seems never to have been questioned, the ceremony cannot have taken place much later than 1429, the date generally assigned to it.

It would be fascinating to know more about the private life of this oddly assorted couple. Katherine's own early childhood had been unsettled, with a background of disruption and war. Her father, Charles VI of France, was subject to long and recurring fits of insanity, during which he was liable to tear his clothes, smash the furniture and imagine himself to be made of glass, so that he dared not move for fear of breaking. Her mother, Isabeau of Bavaria, acquired a considerable reputation for loose living and general bad character. She is said to have neglected her younger children to such an extent that for a time they went ragged and hungry. Katherine's short-lived marriage to Henry V was a matter of high politics and one hopes she found happiness with her Welshman.

Their wedding took place without the knowledge or consent of the Duke of Gloucester – Protector of the realm during the King's minority – and several accounts declare that it was not discovered until after Katherine's death. It is straining credulity somewhat to believe that the Queen Dowager could have successfully concealed at least four pregnancies, even if she was living away from the court. A more probable explanation seems that her unsuitable marriage was tolerated by tacit consent during her lifetime, rather than precipitate a scandal involving the King's mother. Owen may also have had influential friends, for in 1432 he was granted letters of denizenship which relieved him of some, at any rate of the penal legislation then in force against the Welsh people. Towards the end of 1433, however, the family broke up. Katherine retired into the Abbey of Bermondsey, where she died the following January at the age of thirty-five – possibly giving birth to a daughter who did not survive. The Abbess of Barking took charge of the other Tudor children – Edmund and Jasper, then about six and five years old, Owen, who later became a monk, and a girl of whom nothing is known except that she, too, entered the religious life.

Their father's subsequent career contains all the ingredients of an old-fashioned adventure-story. Deprived of his wife's protection, he evidently thought it wiser to remove himself from the vicinity of the Duke of Gloucester. He was at Daventry when, not long after Katherine's death, a summons was

issued by the Council requiring 'one Owen Tudor the which dwelled with the said Queen Katherine' to come into the King's presence. Suspecting a trap, Owen refused to obey unless he was given an assurance in the King's name that he might 'freely come and freely go'. According to a minute of the Privy Council's proceedings dated 15 July 1437, a promise to this effect was conveyed to him by certain Myles Sculle, but Owen was not entirely satisfied. He came to London 'in full secret wise' and took sanctuary at Westminster, where 'he held him many days'. This despite the fact that 'diverse persons stirred him of friendship and fellowship to have comen out thereof, and some in especial have disported him in [the] tavern at Westminster gate'. Owen, no doubt wisely, resisted these persuasions. However, some time later, hearing that the King was 'heavily informed of him', he suddenly appeared in the royal presence and

declared his innocence and his truth, affirming that he had nothing done that should give the King occasion or matter of offence or displeasure against him, offering himself in large wise to answer as the Kings true liege man should to all things that any man could or would submit upon him. And so submitted himself by his said offer to abide all lawful answer.³

He was allowed to depart 'without any impeachment' but shortly afterwards was arrested and committed to Newgate. The Council felt it necessary to justify their action in a somewhat specious memorandum, saying that Owen's 'malicious purpose and imagination' were not known to the King or the Duke of Gloucester when the safe conduct was issued. They added piously that it was 'though marvellous' that one of the King's liegemen should desire any such surety before coming to his presence, and anyway Owen *had* been allowed to go free – for a time.

Polydore Vergil says that he was committed to ward by order of the Duke of Gloucester, 'because he had been so presumptuous as by marriage with the Queen to intermix his blood with the noble race of kings', but there is nothing to support this assertion in the Privy Council minutes. In fact no specific charge is mentioned, but from the very meagre information which does exist it would appear that Owen was involved in some private quarrel – probably of a financial nature – with an unnamed adversary.

An entry in the Chronicle of London for the sixteenth year of the King's reign records that Owen 'brake out of Newgate against night at searching time, through help of his priest, and went his way hurting foul his keeper; but at the last, blessed be God, he was taken again'.⁴ This was probably in February. He was recaptured by Lord Beaumont and temporarily consigned to the dungeons of Wallingford Castle in Berkshire, but later returned to Newgate with his servant and the priest. On 1 March 1438, Lord Beaumont received twenty marks to cover his expenses, and the sum of eighty-nine pounds which was found on the priest was handed over to the Exchequer.⁵ It would be interesting to know if this enterprising cleric was the same priest who had married Owen and Katherine.

When Henry VI reached his majority the fortunes of the Tudor family improved. The gentle, devoted king took a constructive interest in the welfare of his Welsh relations and provided for the education of his two elder half-brothers. As soon as they outgrew the Abbess of Barking, Edmund and Jasper were brought up 'chastely and virtuously' by discreet persons. Their father also received a pension of forty pounds a year which the king, moved by 'certain causes', paid out of the privy purse 'by especial grace'. Owen, who had finally been released from prison in 1439, was now a respected member of the royal household and presently found it convenient to adopt an English style patronymic, Owain ap Maredudd [or Meredith] ap Tudur becoming Owen Tudor.

On Christmas Day 1449 Edmund and Jasper Tudor were knighted. Four years later they were created Earls of Richmond and Pembroke respectively. The king was also apparently instrumental

providing a wife for the Earl of Richmond and in 1445 Edmund married twelve-year-old Margaret Beaufort – a union which was to have far-reaching consequences.

The Beaufort family was the result of a long-ago liaison between John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, third son of Edward III, and Katherine Swynford, a lady of Flemish extraction who had been governess to the Duke's daughters. Their four children were indisputably born on the wrong side of the blanket but after the death of his second wife John of Gaunt proceeded to make an honest woman of Katherine. His Beaufort progeny (so called after the castle in France where they were born) were legitimated by the Pope, by Letters Patent granted by Gaunt's nephew Richard II, and for good measure by Act of Parliament. The Beauforts grew rich and powerful – Cardinal Beaufort, the last survivor of Katherine Swynford's brood, had governed England with the Duke of Gloucester during Henry VI's long minority – and after the King and his heirs they represented the royal and ruling family of Lancaster. Margaret, heiress of her father, John, Duke of Somerset, great-granddaughter of John of Gaunt and later to develop into a remarkable personality in her own right, was a matrimonial prize by any standards – especially for the son of an obscure Welsh squire.

Their marriage coincided with the outbreak of that long-drawn-out dynastic struggle among the too numerous descendants of Edward III, which is known to history as the Wars of the Roses. The quarrel had its roots in the *coup d'état* of 1399, when Henry Bolingbroke, John of Gaunt's eldest son, wrested the crown from his cousin Richard II; and it became progressively more bitter and more complicated – as family quarrels usually do. It was fought out on one side by the pathetic Henry VI and his tigerish Queen, Margaret of Anjou; and on the other, first by the Duke of York and later his son Edward, Earl of March, representing a senior branch of the royal house, but whose descent had twice passed through the female line.

Edmund Tudor did not live to see the outcome. Neither did he live to see his son. He died at Carmarthen early in November 1456, at the age of twenty-six, leaving his young wife six months pregnant. Jasper at once took his brother's widow under his protection, and Margaret Beaufort's child was born at Pembroke Castle on 28 January 1457. He was given, prophetically as it turned out, the royal English name of Henry but at the time the birth attracted little attention. Henry Tudor was said to be a delicate baby. His future looked uncertain.

Meanwhile the deadly power-game of York and Lancaster continued unabated. The Duke of York was killed at Wakefield in December 1460, but his son remained to carry on the struggle. Jasper Tudor, Earl of Pembroke, brave, energetic and loyal, was a leading supporter of the Lancastrian cause, so, too, his father, quite an old man by this time. Nevertheless, Owen Tudor was present, fighting under Jasper's banner, at the battle of Mortimer's Cross near Wigmore on 2 February 1461. The Lancastrians were defeated by the young Earl of March, and Owen, not quite so spry as he had once been, was among those captured. He was brought to Hereford and executed there in the market-place. It seems he could not believe his luck had turned at last for, one old chronicle says, he trusted

all away that he should not be headed till he saw the axe and the block, and when that he was in his doublet he trusted on pardon and grace till the collar of his red velvet doublet was ripped off. Then he said 'that head shall lie on the stock that was wont to lie on Queen Katherine's lap' and put his heart and mind wholly unto God and full meekly took his death.

Afterwards his head was displayed on the highest step of the market-cross and 'a mad woman combed his hair and washed away the blood of his face and she got candles and set about him burning more than a hundred.'⁶ It was a sad but perhaps suitably bizarre end for the adventurous gentleman of Wales who had sired a dynasty of kings, whose great-granddaughter's descendants occupy the English throne.

to this day, and whose great-great-granddaughter was to be the most complex and fascinating personality ever to occupy it and give her name to a whole glittering epoch of English life.

1461 was a black year for the House of Lancaster. On 4 March the nineteen-year-old Earl of March was acclaimed as King Edward IV in Westminster Hall, and his victory over Queen Margaret at Towton at the end of the month confirmed his position. Margaret fled to Scotland, taking Henry VI and their young son with her. For a while she succeeded in keeping the fight alive, but four years later King Henry, reduced by this time to a wandering fugitive in the North Country, was betrayed to his enemies and deposited in the Tower. The Queen and the Prince of Wales sought refuge abroad. The Yorkists appeared triumphant.

Jasper Tudor, who had inherited all his father's slipperiness, escaped after Mortimer's Cross and was reported 'flown and taken to the mountains'. For the next few years he led the life of an underground resistance-leader, moving from one safe house to another in Wales, then turning up in Ireland, then Scotland, over in France, back in Wales again. 'Not always at his heart's ease, nor in security of life or surety of living' he remained unswerving in his devotion to the cause of Lancaster and lost no opportunity, however slight, of stirring up trouble for the new régime.

The task of subduing Wales had been entrusted to William Herbert, himself a Welshman, who was rising in the councils of Edward IV. Pembroke Castle surrendered on 30 September 1461, and in February of the following year Herbert was granted the wardship and marriage of Henry Tudor then five years old. Whether or not the child actually came into the hands of his new guardian at this time is uncertain. Harlech Castle was still holding out for the Lancastrians and provided a convenient shelter for refugees – little Henry may well have been among them. But in 1468 Harlech was besieged and despite an attempt by Jasper to come to its rescue the Castle finally surrendered on 14 August. Jasper got away again but William Herbert was rewarded with his earldom of Pembroke.

In the following year there was another reversal of fortune. Edward IV fell out with his powerful ally, Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick, 'the Kingmaker'. Warwick defected to the other side and in the summer of 1470 came to an arrangement with Queen Margaret, still chafing in exile. Edward was caught unawares, fled abroad in his turn, escaping capture by a hair's breadth. Once more the Lancastrians were in the saddle. The wretched, apathetic Henry VI was brought out of the Tower, dusted off and once more installed in the royal apartments at Westminster.

Another captive was set at liberty by the new turn of events. Jasper Tudor lost no time in recovering his young nephew. According to Polydore Vergil, he found him 'kept as a prisoner, but honourably brought up with the wife of William Herbert'. Jasper, again according to Vergil,

took the boy Henry from the wife of the Lord Herbert, and brought him with himself a little after when he came to London unto King Henry. When the King saw the child, beholding within himself without speech a pretty space the haultie disposition thereof he is reported to have said to the noblemen there present, 'This truly, this is he unto whom both we and our adversaries must yield and give over the dominion.'

'Thus', added Vergil, 'the holy man showed it would come to pass that Henry should in time enjoy the kingdom.'

There was a long road to travel before this pious (and most probably apocryphal) prophecy was fulfilled. Without the help of a crystal-ball, not even the most optimistic well-wisher of Henry Tudor would have foretold in 1470 any other future for him than that of an honoured and profitable career in the service of Henry VI and his heirs. In fact, the Lancastrian revival was short-lived. Barely six months after his flight, Edward was back in England, re-proclaiming himself King. On Easter Day

1471, he defeated Warwick at the battle of Barnet which, appropriately enough, was fought in thick fog. The Kingmaker was killed and Henry VI, 'a man amazed and utterly dulled with troubles and adversity', was taken back to the Tower.

On the day that Barnet was being lost and won, Queen Margaret and her son landed at Weymouth, too late to save the situation. Together with the Lancastrian lords who had rallied to them, they marched up the Severn valley, hoping to join forces with Jasper Tudor and his Welshmen coming down from North Wales. But Edward, with his usual speed and tactical skill, intercepted them at Tewkesbury, an encounter which ended in disaster for the House of Lancaster. The last surviving male members of the Beaufort family lost their lives and the Prince of Wales, for whose sake his mother had struggled so long and so valiantly, was killed trying to escape. On 21 May, Edward IV re-entered London in triumph with the Queen, her spirit broken at last, a prisoner in his train. That same night 'between eleven and twelve of the clock' Henry VI was released from his earthly troubles with the help of a Yorkist sword.

When Jasper heard that Queen Margaret 'was vanquished in a foughten field at Tewkesbury and that matters were past all hope of recovery', he retired to Chepstow (where he had yet another narrow escape from capture and death). He had been unable to help the cause in battle but there was still one important service he could perform. In the person of his fourteen-year-old nephew was now represented the last surviving male of the Lancastrian line – the last slender hope for the future. At all costs Henry Tudor must be kept from falling into Yorkist hands. Margaret Beaufort had confided her son to Jasper's care – a trust which he faithfully performed – and now that there was no possibility 'any comfort or relief to be had for the part of poor King Henry' she asked her brother-in-law to take the boy out of the country to safety.

Jasper made for Pembroke and was immediately besieged. But once again his luck held, and after eight days he was able to make his way through 'ditch and trench' with the help of one David Morgan. He then

departed forthwith to a town by the sea side called Tenby, where having a bark prepared out of hand he sailed into France with his brother's son Henry Earl of Richmond, and certain other his friends and servants, whose chance being to arrive in Brittany he presented himself humbly to Francis, duke there, and, reporting the cause of his coming, submitted himself and his nephew to his protection. The Duke received them willingly, and with such honour, courtesy and favour entertained them as though they had been his brothers, promising them upon his honour that within his dominion they should be from thenceforth far from injury, and pass at their pleasure to and fro without danger.⁷

Nevertheless, the young Earl of Richmond was to have at least two very nasty moments during his exile. Edward IV made several attempts to persuade the Duke of Brittany to part with his guest – 'the only imp now left of King Henry VI's blood' – and on one occasion very nearly succeeded, sending ambassadors 'laden with great substance of gold' and with instructions to tell the Duke that he intended to arrange a marriage for young Henry which would unite the rival factions 'by affinity'. Duke Francis was convinced, either by the sight of the gold or the smooth-talking ambassadors, and delivered the Earl of Richmond into their hands, 'not supposing that he had committed the sheep to the wolf, but the son to the father'. Edward's ambassadors set off with their prize towards the coast but Henry 'knowing that he was carried to his death, through agony of mind fell by the way into a fever'. (Or was he desperately playing for time, in much the same way as his granddaughter was to do in later years?) Fortunately the Duke was warned in time that 'the Earl of Richmond was not so earnestly sought for to be coupled in marriage with King Edward's daughter, as to have his head

parted from his body with an axe.’⁸ Henry was snatched back at St Malo and thereafter more closely guarded by his host – partly for his own safety and partly to appease the English government, who continued to pay the Bretons handsomely to keep him prisoner.

It cannot have been a very cheerful existence for the young man, helpless to defend himself, knowing that his life depended on the goodwill of a protector who might at any time be subjected to heavy financial and political pressures from outside (though, in fact, Duke Francis was to prove a good friend) and with little apparent prospect of ever being able to lead a normal life and enjoy even the fruits of his own earldom.

Then, suddenly, in April 1483, Edward IV was dead. His two young sons fell into the hands of his brother, Richard Duke of Gloucester, who proceeded to declare the King’s marriage to have been defective and his children bastards. The Princes were lodged in the Tower and shortly afterwards disappeared permanently and mysteriously from sight. In June, Richard of Gloucester was King of England. He was not popular. In an age not noted for squeamishness many of his subjects were repelled by persistent rumours that he had had his nephews murdered, and the future of the exile in Brittany looked unexpectedly brighter. Margaret Beaufort, now married for the third time to Lord Stanley, a powerful magnate generally regarded as a Yorkist supporter, set to work to build up a following for her son – no doubt beginning with her husband. She also quietly approached Edward IV’s widow, Elizabeth Woodville, who had been stripped of her royal dignity by Richard, suggesting that a marriage between Henry Tudor and the widow’s eldest daughter, Elizabeth, would solve a great many problems, by uniting the rival factions once and for all and ousting the usurper. The Queen and her daughter were agreeable. Other people, too, alarmed by the ferocity of the new King’s behaviour had begun to think in terms of Henry Tudor as a possible replacement. The Duke of Buckingham declared in his favour and messengers were sent to Brittany inviting the Earl of Richmond to come and claim his bride and his kingdom.

With the help of Duke Francis, Henry gathered a force of fifteen ships and 5000 mercenaries and embarked for England in October. But the rising was still-born. Richard fell on the conspirators with his usual violence. Buckingham was executed and even Margaret Beaufort had a narrow escape. Fortunately for her son, the winds had scattered his small fleet, driving it back on the coast of France. He himself got as far as Plymouth, but ‘viewing afar of all the shore beset with soldiers’ and realising that it would be suicidal to land, ‘hoisted up sail’ and returned to Brittany. But despite this setback the tide was running in his favour. Fugitives from Richard’s rule began to gather round him, and on Christmas Day 1483 Henry Tudor swore a solemn oath in the cathedral at Rennes ‘that so soon as he should be King he would marry Elizabeth, King Edward’s daughter’.

All the same, his troubles were not yet over. The following September he was to have a very narrow escape indeed. King Richard, like King Edward before him, had already done his best to ensure that Henry should at least be kept a permanent prisoner in his Breton sanctuary. But after the Buckingham episode the King, ‘more doubting than trusting in his own cause, was vexed and tormented in mind with fear almost perpetually of the Earl Henry and his confederates’ return; wherefore he had ‘a miserable life’.⁹ Determined ‘to rid himself of this inward grief’, Richard despatched another embassy to Brittany. Unfortunately, Duke Francis had ‘become feeble by reason of sore and daily sickness’ and the ambassadors were received by his treasurer, Peter Landois. They offered the yearly revenues of the earldom of Richmond, together with those of the other English nobles who had fled since the rising, in return for Henry’s surrender. Peter Landois, a man ‘of sharp wit and great authority’, was ruling ‘all matters as he list’ in the incapacity of his master, and as a result had aroused considerable hostility among his own countrymen. According to Polydore Vergil, he felt that the King of England would be

powerful ally against his enemies at home, and for that reason and not any personal spite he agreed to betray Henry Tudor.

Once again the luck held. Henry heard about Landois's plans and, 'thinking it meet to provide for his affairs with all diligence', applied for and got a safe conduct from the King of France. He sent word to the faithful Jasper to get himself and the other English refugees across the frontier into Anjou without delay, and set about arranging his own escape. He gave out that he was going to visit a friend who lived near by;

but when he had journeyed almost five miles, he withdrew hastily out of the highway into the next wood and donning a servant's apparel he as a servant followed one of his own servants (who was his guide in that journey) as though he had been his master, and rode on with so great celerity that he made no stay anywhere, except it were to bait his horses, before he had gotten himself to his company within the bounds of Anjou.¹⁰

Not a moment too soon, for when Peter Landois, 'who wanted no subtlety', heard that Henry had gone

he sent out horsemen incontinent every way to pursue, and if they could overtake him, to apprehend and bring the earl to him. The horsemen made such haste as that there was never thing more nigh the achieving than the overtaking of the earl; he was scarce an hour entered the bounds of France when they came thither.¹¹

It is pleasant to know that Duke Francis recovered, and when he heard that 'Henry was so uncourteously entertained as that he was forced to fly out of his dominion' was very angry with Peter Landois, at least so Polydore Vergil says. It is also salutary to remember that the whole future of the dynasty and the very existence of Elizabeth Tudor may well have depended on that quick change in Breton wood, and a dash to safety with barely an hour to spare.

The fugitives were welcomed in France and the exile began 'to have good hope of happy success'. By the following summer the time seemed ripe for another attempt on England. At best it was likely to be a desperate venture, and delay might indeed be fatal. There was no knowing how much longer Elizabeth of York would be allowed to remain unmarried, the loyalty of the English refugees – many of them discontented Yorkists – could not be relied on for ever and France might yet prove inhospitable. Henry borrowed money, 'a slender supply' from the French King, and more where he could get it, and left Paris to start collecting a fleet. On 1 August 1485 – 'thinking it needful to make haste, that his friends should not be any longer kept in perplexity between hope and dread, uncertain what to do' – he sailed from the mouth of the Seine with 2000 armed men and a few ships, and 'with a soft southern wind' behind him. A week later he landed at Milford Haven and began his march up through Wales towards the Midlands, gathering support as he went. The local gentry came in to join him, less because he was the last Lancastrian than because he was Owen Tudor's grandson and Jasper's nephew. 'He was of no great stature', this unknown Welshman, the adventurer come to conquer if he could, 'his countenance was cheerful and courageous, his hair yellow like burnished gold, his eyes gray, shining and quick.'¹²

Henry had sent messages to his mother but he still did not know how the powerful Stanley family was going to react, and as he approached the English heartland he heard that King Richard 'with a host innumerable was at hand'. The final confrontation, the great gamble on which everything depended, took place on 22 August at the village of Market Bosworth, 'a little beyond Leicester'. After two hours' fierce fighting it was all over. The naked corpse of the last Plantagenet king had been carried ignominiously away, slung across the back of a horse, to be buried in the Franciscan Abbey

Leicester. The crown had been found in a hawthorn bush and placed on Henry Tudor's head by Lord Stanley.

The new King was twenty-eight. He had had no practical experience of government or of war. As he himself is supposed to have said, he had been either a prisoner or a fugitive since he was five years old. Apart from one brief visit in his boyhood, he had never set foot in England before. His hereditary tide was not impressive and devolved entirely from his mother. If descent from Edward I through the female line was admitted, then there were Yorkist claimants alive with unquestionably better titles in law, not least Henry's intended bride, Elizabeth, eldest surviving child of Edward IV. But the majority of his subjects were less concerned with the legality of Henry VII's claim to the crown than with his ability to hold on to it. The dynastic struggles of the past thirty years had not unduly affected the life of the country as a whole. It had not been a civil war fought over some fundamental principle of the kind that tears a nation apart. Ordinary people had been able to conduct their affairs more or less undisturbed, while the great pursued a more than usually stimulating form of bloodsport. But, in an age when the government was the King, continued uncertainty as to who was likely to be occupying the throne next was unsettling. It was bad for business, bad for the order of administration of justice, and bred dangerous habits of disrespect for the rule of law. The crown was weakened and impoverished, the nobility were becoming disagreeably powerful and England had lost prestige abroad. If the new dynasty could establish a strong central authority, it would be assured of support from the solid middle block of the population with a stake in stability and prosperity.

In January 1486, Henry redeemed the pledge given at Rennes two years before and married Elizabeth, King Edward's daughter. In the veins of the second and third generations of Tudor monarchs would flow the blood of Plantagenet, both York and Lancaster, of Valois and Mortimer, Neville and Woodville, of the lady from Flanders and the seneschal to the princes of Gwynedd.

Like her bridegroom, Elizabeth was very much a child of the warring factions. She had been twice hurried into sanctuary with her mother; had suffered the grief of the unexplained disappearance and sinister end of her two brothers, and all the other alarms and anxieties of Richard's reign. She was a pretty, fair-haired girl in her early twenties at the time of her marriage, sweet-tempered, docile and affectionate; generous to her less fortunate younger sisters and kind to her mother, who was by all accounts a rather tiresome woman with an unlucky talent for making enemies.

Henry allowed his wife no share in the executive power, but there is no indication that she even expected it or resented the fact that he wore a crown which should rightfully have been hers. Elizabeth of York seems to have been perfectly content with the role of Queen Consort, and certainly nobly fulfilled her prime function, giving birth to eight children before her death in 1503. Only one son and two daughters survived into adult life, not a very good omen even in an age of high infant-mortality, but it was enough to secure the succession.

Henry VII has been likened to a man who, starting from virtually nothing, built up a flourishing family business. His spirit, says Polydore Vergil, was distinguished, wise and prudent, his mind brave and resolute. John Stow thought him 'a prince of marvellous wisdom, policy, justice, temperance and gravity'. In private life he was a devoted son, an affectionate husband and a conscientious father. He was fond of music, a keen sportsman and generous to those in trouble. In spite of his early disadvantages, he was a cultured man, a patron of literature and the arts with a taste and talent for royal magnificence. His public abilities as king and statesman are beyond dispute, but he remained essentially a lonely figure – cold, secret and remote. His precarious youth had taught him to trust no one completely, to keep his own counsel and, above all, the importance of holding on to what he had won. He was admired, feared and respected by his contemporaries, but not loved. The first Hen-

Tudor lacked the precious gift of personal magnetism possessed in such abundance by his granddaughter Elizabeth, who in many other ways so closely resembled him, but he laid the foundation without which her achievement would have been impossible.

When he died the country was at peace. The crown was solvent. Despite some determined challenges, his dynasty was established and accepted. Reputable foreign monarchs were prepared to marry their children into it. There was a healthy male heir of full age ready to take over. Few men could have done more.

The King's Great Matter

ON one point everybody was agreed: the youthful Henry VIII was a most magnificent specimen of manhood, who seemed to embody all the gifts and graces of the ideal Christian monarch. When he succeeded to his father's throne in the spring of 1509 his contemporaries went wild with delight over this 'new and auspicious star', this 'lover of justice and goodness', their dazzling eighteen-year-old King. 'If you could see how all the world here is rejoicing in the possession of so great a prince,' wrote William Mountjoy to Desiderius Erasmus,

how his life is all their desire, you could not contain your tears for joy. The heavens laugh, the earth exults, all things are full of milk, of honey and of nectar! Avarice is expelled the country. Liberality scatters wealth with bounteous hand. Our king does not desire gold or gems or precious metals, but virtue, glory, immortality.¹

The country was ready for a change. In his last years Henry VII had become 'a dark prince infinitely suspicious' and his subjects, forgetting the many solid benefits he had brought them, complained loud and bitterly about the shocking extortions of his tax collectors. In 1509 it really seemed as if a new era – 'called then the golden world' – had dawned, and few English kings have ever embarked on their reigns in such a general atmosphere of goodwill and buoyant optimism that the future father of Elizabeth Tudor – 'our natural, young, lusty and courageous prince and sovereign lord, King Harry the Eighth'.

As a physical type, the new King resembled his maternal grandfather, Edward IV, who was 'very tall of personage, exceeding the stature almost of all others' and 'of visage lovely, of body mighty, strong and clean-made. Howbeit in his latter days, with over-liberal diet, somewhat corpulent and burly. ...' Descriptions which could equally well have been applied to his grandson. The descriptions of Henry's own appearance as a young man were lyrical. Piero Pasqualigo, the Venetian Ambassador Extraordinary, writing in 1515, declared that 'His Majesty is the handsomest potentate I ever set eyes on; above the usual height, with an extremely fine calf to his leg, his complexion very fair and bright with auburn hair combed straight and short in the French fashion, and a round face so very beautiful that it would become a pretty woman.'² Four years later, Sebastian Giustinian, another Venetian, was just as complimentary. Nature could not have done more for the King, he said. He was much handsomer than any other sovereign in Christendom, very fair and his whole frame admirably proportioned.

Henry took after his grandfather Edward in other ways. The Yorkist king had been noted for his popularity and, as Polydore Vergil rather disapprovingly remarked, 'would use himself more familiarly among private persons than the honour of his majesty required'. Edward had fully realised the truth of the somewhat cynical observation that 'the common people oftentimes more esteem and take for greater kindness a little courtesy, than a great benefit'. Henry knew this too, whether consciously or not. He mingled freely with the common people, and when he chose to exert his charm he could be irresistible. Thomas More put his finger on it when he wrote to John Fisher: 'the king has a way of making every man feel that he is enjoying his special favour, just as the London wives pray before the image of Our Lady by the Tower till each of them believes it is smiling upon *her*'.³

Henry had also inherited the prodigious energy of his Plantagenet forbears, and to his admirers

subjects there seemed no end to the skills and accomplishments of their glorious prince. According to the Venetians, he could draw the bow with greater strength than any man in England and jousted marvellously. He was a capital horseman, inordinately fond of hunting, and capable of tiring out eight or ten horses in one day. He was an enthusiastic tennis-player, 'at which game', wrote Sebastian Giustinian, 'it is the prettiest thing in the world to see him play, his fair skin glowing through a shirt of the finest texture'.⁴ The King was, in fact, a first-rate all-round sportsman – wrestling, tilting, shooting, hawking, dancing, running at the ring, casting of the bar – whatever form of physical exercise he engaged in, he excelled at.

Nor was his prowess only athletic. Henry had plenty of native shrewdness and a good brain, when he stood still long enough to use it. He had been well educated. He was an enthusiastic amateur theologian. He spoke fluent French and Latin, some Spanish and a little Italian. He enjoyed the company of scholars and liked to display his own learning. A music-lover like his father, he was himself a talented musician. He played the lute, organ, virginals and harpsichord, could sing 'from a book at sight' and composed two five-part masses, a motet and many instrumental pieces, rounds and part songs.

Pastance with good company
I love and shall until I die

he sang to his own accompaniment and, thanks to old Henry's careful counting of the pennies, 'such a grace of plenty reigned' that young Henry was able 'to follow his desire and appetite' to his heart's content. With the unselfconscious absorption of a child, he threw himself into the delightful business of cutting a dash in the world. He received the Venetian ambassadors under a canopy of cloth of gold wearing a doublet of white and crimson satin and a purple velvet mantle lined with white satin. Round his neck was a gold collar from which hung a diamond the size of a walnut, while his fingers 'were one mass of jewelled rings'. Mounted on a warhorse caparisoned in cloth of gold with a raised pile, he looked like St George in person. On board his new warship, named in honour of his sister Mary, he acted as pilot, wearing 'a sailor's coat and trousers made of cloth of gold, and a gold chain with the inscription "Dieu est mon Droit", to which was suspended a whistle, which he blew nearly as loud as a trumpet'.⁵ He had a passion for dressing up – as Robin Hood; 'in Turkey fashion'; 'in white satin and green, embroidered and set with letters and castles of fine gold in bullion'; in an abbreviated suit 'blue velvet and crimson with long sleeves, all cut and lined with cloth of gold'.⁶ 'Youth will need to have dalliance,' sang the King; and tournaments, pageants, banquets, revels and 'disguisings' followed one another in an unending, untiring stream, so that life was spent 'in continual festival'.

From across the centuries one's mind balks at the splendours, the superlatives, the super-human energy, the sheer prodigality and over-exuberance of it all. He was more than life-size, this amazing young man: a great, sumptuous, heraldic beast, rampant on a field of scarlet and gold, 'disposed all to mirth and pleasure', innocently exulting in his own magnificence. There were not many signs as yet of that other beast, the cold-hearted egotist, tricky, violent and cruel, which lurked behind the smooth pink and white countenance with its intermittent aureole of fluffy red beard. Some people caught a glimpse of it. George Cavendish, Thomas Wolsey's gentleman usher, watching his master's rise to power, noticed indulgently enough that the King 'loved nothing worse than to be constrained to do anything contrary to his royal will and pleasure'. Thomas More saw deeper. Even in the unclouded days when Henry used to send for him to discuss 'astronomy, geometry, divinity, and such other faculties'; and when 'for the pleasure he took in his company' would visit More at his house

Chelsea and walk in the garden with him, an arm flung round his shoulders, Sir Thomas had no illusions. He told his son-in-law, William Roper, that if his head could win the King a castle in France 'it should not fail to go'.⁷

One of Henry's first actions had been to get himself a wife. Barely six weeks after he came to the throne he married his brother's widow, the Spanish princess Catherine of Aragon, * daughter of the redoubtable monarchs Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon – *los Reyes Catolicos* – the Catholic Kings of Spain. Catherine had come to England in 1501, when she was fifteen, to be married to Arthur, Henry's elder brother, then Prince of Wales. Not quite five months after the wedding young Arthur was dead and, in order to preserve the Anglo-Spanish alliance, Catherine had been betrothed to Henry, then rising eleven years old, their marriage to take place when he was fifteen. Then Isabella of Castile died. The political situation in Spain looked less stable. Henry VII, always cautious, had hesitated, wondering if after all he might do better for his one remaining son. The marriage was postponed and Catherine remained a widow, a pawn in the game of dynastic politics and the victim of a not very edifying dispute over the payment of the second instalment of her dowry. For seven years she waited stoically enduring the humiliating position of a guest who had outstayed her welcome. Cold shouldered and neglected, dependent on the reluctant provision of her father-in-law, Catherine had no money to pay her servants, hardly enough money for food and clothes, but she refused to despair. She had come to England to be married, to serve Spain with her own body, and in England she would stand firm. Even in her teens, Catherine of Aragon had a will of iron. In 1509 she got her reward. In the best tradition of all fairy tales, Prince Charming came into his own, rescued the forlorn princess and carried her off in triumph. It certainly looked like a happy ending.

Catherine was not startlingly beautiful but she was a good-looking girl, small and slender, with clear grey eyes and a mass of russet-coloured hair. She was also intelligent and thoughtful, and in the early days Henry relied on her a good deal, respecting her opinion and listening to her advice. Many of his most extravagant entertainments were planned, so he said, for her pleasure and Catherine never failed to be suitably appreciative. He wore her favour in the lists; heard vespers and compline every day in her chamber; read the latest books with her and hurried to bring her any titbits of news he thought would interest her.⁸

The King found his diversions, of course; that was to be expected. There was Elizabeth Blount who bore his bastard son in 1519. Later there was Mary Boleyn. There may well have been others. All the same, despite his highly coloured reputation, Henry was no Don Juan. By the standards of royal behaviour at the time, he was a faithful husband, at any rate in those early years, and Catherine repaid him with steadfast loyalty and devotion. Well bred, virtuous and dutiful, she had every quality of an ideal Queen Consort except the all-important one: she could not produce a healthy son.

The tragedy of the Queen's child-bearing began in 1510 with a still-born daughter. A son arrived on New Year's Day 1511, but lived only a few weeks. Time went by and more pregnancies ended in miscarriages, in babies born dead, babies who lived only a few days. Then, in February 1516, a child was born at Greenwich, alive and healthy. It was a girl, christened Mary. The King was philosophical at least in public. 'We are both young', he said to a congratulatory ambassador; 'if it was a daughter this time, by the grace of God the sons will follow.' In the autumn of 1517 Catherine miscarried again. In November 1518 she was delivered of a still-born child. It was her last pregnancy.

By the early 1520s Henry was seriously worried about the succession. In June 1525 he created his bastard Henry Fitzroy, then six years old, Duke of Richmond – a semi-royal title. There was even talk of a marriage between Richmond and the legitimate heiress, Princess Mary. Henry's love affair with his wife had long since grown cold. Catherine was nearly forty now, her prettiness faded, her slender

figure thickened and spread – although ambassadors still remarked on her beautiful complexion. Henry no longer needed her as audience and confidante. Her very nationality had become a liability, English foreign policy, under the guidance of Thomas Wolsey, leaned more and more towards French alliance. And there were no sons.

In the early spring of 1527, something or someone led the King to open his Bible and turn to the Book of Leviticus. There, in the twentieth chapter, he read: ‘... if a man shall take his brother’s wife it is an unclean thing ... they shall be childless’. According to Henry’s own account, once his attention had been drawn to these alarming words, he began to have qualms (that famous scruple which ‘pricked’ his conscience) soon to grow into an unalterable conviction that his marriage was against God’s law; that for eighteen years he had been living in incestuous adultery with his brother’s wife. And the fact that they were childless, or as good as childless, was surely, he reasoned, a sign of God’s displeasure. After all, Henry asked himself, why else should God who had favoured him in all things and whom he regarded very much in the light of a senior partner, deny him living sons? Obviously something must be done, and the King turned to Cardinal Wolsey, always so reliable, so devoted to his master’s interests and anxious only to satisfy his royal will and pleasure. Wolsey, confronted with what was in effect a command to arrange the removal of the Queen with a minimum of scandal and inconvenience, did his usual efficient best to oblige and in May 1527 instituted the divorce proceedings, or, to be more exact, the nullity suit which was to have such incalculably far-reaching effects on the whole course of English life.

The first tentative steps in ‘the King’s great matter’, as it was carefully referred to by those in the know, were taken in an atmosphere of elaborate secrecy; but it was not long before news of it leaked out. By midsummer the whole affair, as the Spanish ambassador scornfully remarked, was ‘as notorious as if it had been proclaimed by the public crier’. By the end of the summer it was being freely rumoured that the pricking of the King’s conscience was not the only spur prompting him to question the validity of his marriage to Catherine of Aragon. No one knows exactly when Henry first became enamoured of Anne Boleyn, but certainly by September what George Cavendish described as ‘the long hid and secret love’ between the King and Mistress Anne was a secret no longer.

The rise of the Boleyn family, who came originally and obscurely from Sail in Norfolk, had followed the classic pattern. Early in the fifteenth century, Geoffrey Boleyn, second son of a tenant farmer working some thirty acres of land, came up to London to seek his fortune. In 1428 he was admitted to the freedom of the City in the art of hatter, but subsequently changed his trade to become a mercer. In 1446 he was Sheriff of London and also of Middlesex. He married the daughter of Lord Hoo and Hastings; held the office of Lord Mayor in 1457 and before his death in 1463 had firmly established the family fortunes – acquiring the property of Blickling Hall in Norfolk from Sir John Fastolf and the manor and castle of Hever from the Cobhams of Kent. His son William had no need to concern himself with commerce. He was created Knight of the Bath at Richard III’s coronation and was able to lead the pleasant life of a wealthy country squire. The Boleyns were now well on the way up the social ladder and William married into the noble Anglo-Irish family of Butler. His wife Margaret was the daughter and co-heir of Thomas Butler, last Earl of Ormonde. William Boleyn’s son, Thomas, came to court to make his way in the royal service – one of the new men of the new dynasty. Thomas Boleyn had all the qualifications of a capable underling and by 1512 he was being entrusted with diplomatic missions abroad. He also made a useful marriage – to Lady Elizabeth Howard, one of the daughters of the second Duke of Norfolk. There were three surviving children from this marriage, George, Mary and Anne.

There has always been some confusion between the Boleyn sisters and controversy over Anne’s da

of birth. William Camden, the scholar and antiquarian, who held a post at her daughters court and who, as a friend and confidant of William Cecil, had access to much first-hand information, gives categorically as 1507. However, recent research, based on a new reading of an undated (and wildly misspelt) letter written by Anne to her father, has revived the case for an earlier date, around 1501, placing her in the Netherlands at the court of Margaret of Austria in the spring of 1513. If this is correct, then it would make Anne well into her mid-twenties before she first caught the King's eye and in her early thirties, unusually late for a first pregnancy, when Elizabeth was born.

It is certain that one of the Boleyn girls, identified only as Mademoiselle Boullan, did go over to the Netherlands, but this may have been Mary, the elder of the two, and certainly it was Mary who went to France in 1514 in the train of the King's sister when she was briefly married off to old Louis XII. Anne is also known to have spent some part of her girlhood at the French court, and it is possible that she, too, went over in 1514. Alternatively, it may not have been until 1519, when Thomas Boleyn was appointed ambassador, that she crossed the Channel to be 'finished' in the household of Queen Claude, wife of François I.

Whatever the true sequence of these events, she was back in England by the end of 1521. Her father had used his growing influence to get her accepted as one of Queen Catherine's maids of honour and she was present at the New Year revels, wearing a gown of yellow satin and a caul of Venice gold. Thomas Boleyn was planning a match for her with one of her Irish kinsmen – a project which, for reasons connected with the political situation in Ireland, had the active support of the King and Cardinal Wolsey. But the negotiations made slow progress and finally came to nothing. Meanwhile Mistress Anne was looking round for a husband on her own account and her choice fell on Henry Percy, the twenty-year-old son and heir of the Earl of Northumberland. This rather slow-witted young man was attached to Wolsey's entourage and 'when it chanced the Lord Cardinal at any time to repair to the court, the Lord Percy would then resort for his pastime unto the Queen's chamber, and there would fall in dalliance among the Queen's maidens, being at the last more conversant with Mistress Anne Boleyn than with any other'.⁹ The two young people soon reached an understanding, but a blossoming romance was ruthlessly blighted by Wolsey who, in a public scolding, reduced the unfortunate Percy to tears for so far forgetting himself and his position as to become entangled with a foolish girl yonder in the court', and warning him 'not once to resort to her company again' on pain of his father's and the King's severe displeasure.

George Cavendish believed that the King had already begun to 'kindle the brand of amours' for the lady in question and had ordered the Cardinal to intervene. With the benefit of hindsight this must have seemed a perfectly reasonable assumption, but there is no evidence to suggest that Henry had kindled any amorous feelings for Anne Boleyn in 1522. A less romantic but more plausible explanation is that Wolsey had simply acted to prevent an important nobleman's son entrusted to his care from being trapped into matrimony by a scheming young woman of no particular family. As for Anne, she showed her furious disappointment so openly that she was sent home in disgrace and, so far as is known, did not return to court until 1525 or early 1526.

It is a little hard to understand just what Henry saw in her. She was certainly not an especially beautiful girl. Her complexion is variously described as sallow or 'rather dark'. She had a slight deformity – a rudimentary sixth finger – on one hand and a mole, or strawberry mark, on her neck. The Venetian ambassador, a reasonably detached observer, wrote in 1532: 'Madam Anne is not one of the handsomest women in the world; she is of middling stature, swarthy complexion, long neck, wide mouth, bosom not much raised, and in fact has nothing but the English King's great appetite, and her eyes, which are black and beautiful.'¹⁰ Her eyes seem to have been her best feature; another

ambassador remarked enigmatically that they 'invited to conversation'. She also had quantities thick, glossy black hair. She sang well, played the lute and was a graceful dancer, but apart from her French education appears to have had no special advantages or accomplishments to distinguish her from many other young women of her time and class. She is said to have had a ready wit, but no record of it has survived. Nevertheless, attractive she undoubtedly was. Thomas Wyatt, the able and sophisticated courtier and poet, unquestionably found her so. Probably her fascination lay in the special quality of sexual magnetism which eludes description, defies portraiture and has very little to do with physical beauty. She also had a venomous temper, rapacious ambition and a definite tendency to hysteria. It proved a highly explosive mixture and Elizabeth Tudor's mother was to leave a trail of wrecked lives behind her.

Henry must presumably have started in serious pursuit of Anne Boleyn some time towards the end of 1526 and became 'so amorously affectionate that will bare place and high discretion was banished for the time'. But the King soon made the surprising discovery that Anne had no intention of becoming his mistress. Her sister Mary had already filled that position and gained little as a result. Thomas Boleyn's younger daughter, from her vantage point as maid-of-honour, had been able to watch the Queen's influence weakening and had begun to realise that if she kept her head and played her cards skilfully she might conceivably win for herself an unimaginably greater prize. Whatever her faults Anne had courage, vision and tremendous strength of will. Henry now in his mid-thirties, was still an extremely attractive man – foreign ambassadors were still writing eulogies about his angelic appearance. He also had the almost magical aura of his kingship, quite apart from the famous charm. It would have taken very considerable resolution to refuse to give him what he wanted; not to mention the tact and finesse needed to make him accept her rebuff without resentment. This is remarkable enough. Even more astonishing is the undoubted fact that she contrived to go on resisting (and entralling) him for six years – sometimes repulsing, sometimes encouraging, meek, imperious, seductive, pettish by turns. In another age, Anne Boleyn might have found an outlet for her energy and talent on the stage. Her daughter Elizabeth certainly inherited her very considerable histrionic talent.

Henry was not used to being refused, and what he could not have he wanted with furious concentration. Having satisfied himself that Anne was only interested in marriage, he made up his mind with majestic simplicity to give her marriage. Here, he decided, was a woman worthy to be the mother of his sons. He did not, however, tell Wolsey about his matrimonial intentions when he first broached the subject of divorce in the spring of 1527. That September, when the Cardinal (who had been hoping to replace Queen Catherine with a French princess) saw what was in the wind, he was 'extremely annoyed at a circumstance which boded no good to him'. But Wolsey concealed his feelings. Anne Boleyn was not the only person in England who disliked him, and his position depended almost entirely on the King's goodwill. The King must therefore be given what he wanted.

In normal conditions this should not have presented insuperable problems. The ending of a marriage – especially a royal marriage – by a decree of nullity was by no means without precedent, and provided a reasonably viable case could be made out the Pope would be unlikely to disoblige so dutiful a son of the Church as the King of England. Unfortunately for Henry, conditions were not normal. In Italy, one of the interminable wars between France and the Habsburg empire was in progress, and in the early summer of 1527 Rome suffered occupation and sack by a Habsburg army. The Pope was virtually a prisoner of the Habsburg Charles V, the most powerful monarch in Christendom, Holy Roman Emperor, ruler of Spain, the Spanish Netherlands and a whole patchwork of German states. And Charles, who had a strong sense of family loyalty, was Queen Catherine's nephew. As soon as Catherine heard about her husband's intentions – and she heard about them soon

than he meant her to – she appealed energetically to her nephew for help, begging him to prevent a hearing of the case in England and especially any hearing of it by Wolsey. Henry was by now sending a procession of envoys to Rome, all badgering the Pope for a commission giving Wolsey full powers to hear the case and pronounce judgement on it without fear of reversal. The Holy Father shed tears and tore his beard. He temporised. He hesitated. Eventually, however, as the French advanced and the Emperor's army of occupation retreated in disorder, he agreed to send Cardinal Lorenzo Campeggio to England with a decretal commission authorising him and Wolsey jointly to enquire into the validity of the King's marriage and declare it null and void if the facts seemed to warrant it – a document worded that it virtually directed the verdict in Henry's favour. But Campeggio was also given instructions not to let the commission out of his possession. He was to take no irrevocable action without reference to Rome. He was to delay matters as much as possible and, if possible, persuade the King to abandon the whole idea.

Campeggio arrived in London on 9 October 1528. He found Henry restive and impatient for action. He was not amenable to persuasion and appeared so completely satisfied with the justice of his cause that, after a long interview with him, Campeggio reported that he believed an angel descending from heaven would be unable to persuade him otherwise. Henry based his argument on the text in Leviticus and on the contention that the Pope who had originally issued dispensations for his marriage to Catherine (or any other Pope for that matter) had no authority to dispense the law of God. Catherine's main line of defence was simple. Her marriage to Prince Arthur had never been consummated, she told Campeggio. She had come to Henry *virgo intacta*. Therefore, the question of the Leviticus prohibition and the Pope's powers to dispense it did not arise; although, as she pointed out, this had already been carefully gone into at the time of her second betrothal. She refused all bribes, all attempts to induce her to retire gracefully into a convent. She was unmoved by threats. She believed herself to be Henry's lawful wife. If she blasphemed against the sacrament of marriage, she would be damning her immortal soul and consenting to the damnation of her husband's. She would be admitting that she had lived in sin for nearly twenty years and that her daughter was a bastard. She would also leave the way open for Anne Boleyn. All her instincts as a woman, wife, mother and Queen were outraged.

By the following summer Campeggio had run out of delaying tactics. In June 1529 the legatine court, which was to consider the King of England's marriage, opened at Blackfriars and cited Henry and Catherine to appear. It was an extraordinary occasion, and one unprecedented in England. The King did not appear to notice that he was admitting the right of a foreign power to set up a court in his own realm and to summon him before it as a private individual. Nothing mattered, it seemed, if he could only get his divorce. Honest George Cavendish, watching the progress of events from his place in Wolsey's shadow, was deeply shocked. In his *Life of his master*, he lamented the wilfulness of princes against whose appetites no reasonable persuasions would suffice. 'And above all things', he went on, 'there is no one thing that causeth them to be more wilful than carnal desire and voluptuous affection of foolish love.'

On 18 June the Queen lodged a formal protest against the jurisdiction of the legatine court, and appealed to the Pope to advocate the case to Rome. Three days later she made her famous appeal to Henry himself. In the great hall at Blackfriars before both cardinals and the whole bench of bishops she knelt at her husband's feet and begged him, for all the love that had been between them, to do her justice and right and to take some pity on her. 'And when ye had me at the first', she said, 'I take God to my judge that I was a very maid without touch of man; and whether it be true or no, I put it to your conscience.' There was silence. Henry looked straight ahead, stony-faced. Catherine finished her speech. She rose from her knees, curtsied and turned to go, ignoring the repeated summons from the

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