

# BLUFF KING HAL<sup>1</sup>

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WHAT manner of man was King Harry, Defender of the Faith, Liberator from the bonds of Rome? Many and diverse have been the answers to this question, keen the contention it has aroused. He has been pilloried as a monster of iniquity, the protagonist of merciless tyranny, brutality, and lust—the devil incarnate. Scholars of other mind have held him up to admiration as one of the truly great and noble figures of history, a genius of statecraft, who clearly discerned not merely the wishes but the needs of the English people, and with unfaltering enthusiasm and unparalleled ability proceeded to give form to the nebulous ideas and aspirations of his fellow-countrymen and to weld the nation into a stable, mighty, and independent entity. Others, again, argue that he was not the master, but the man—puppet of intriguers, who, by pandering to his grosser self, molded him to their will. On only one point do the hero-worshippers and the iconoclasts seem agreed—that he left a vivid impress upon the history of his country. But, until recent years at least, there has been no middle course between execration and adulation. Even the vast fund of information rendered available by modern research, and particularly through the compilation of the “Letters and Papers of the Reign of Henry VIII.,” published under the direction of the Master of the Rolls, has only inadequately served to stimulate historians to probe more deeply beneath the surface, and, discarding the prejudices born less of national than of ecclesiastical allegiance, to endeavor to depict King Harry as he really was and to appraise justly the part played by him in the development of England. The mystery of Mary Stuart still pales beside the mystery of Henry Tudor.

Now, however, there are signs that a solution is approaching. Such a sign is

<sup>1</sup> *King Henry VIII.* By Albert Frederick Pollard. Longmans, Green & Co., New York. \$2.60, net.

the appearance of Mr. Pollard's “Henry VIII.,” which, originally issued in a sumptuous and costly edition, has been reissued in a less expensive and more convenient form and with revisions and additions that greatly increase its value. Mr. Pollard has no illusions respecting the weaknesses and defects of Henry's character, but neither would he withhold a generous meed of praise for that which he deems truly admirable. In some respects—prompted, perhaps, by unconscious enthusiasm for the after effects of the Reformation—he gives undue rein to the imaginative quality which he possesses to a high degree, and which invests his work with a rare charm. But it would be unfair to rank him with Henry's apologists. If the picture he presents be not wholly satisfactory, its shortcomings are in no way due to bias for or against its subject. They are rooted in his interpretation of what he correctly finds to be the key to Henry's policy and career—the temper of the people over whom he ruled as well as reigned. Admitting the force of the argument that Henry's success was largely, if not solely, due to the fact that, despot though he was, he kept in touch with and hearkened to the voice of public opinion, the query immediately rises, If Henry is to be explained by reference to the nation, how stood it with the nation? In his reply to this query Mr. Pollard, it seems to me, has fallen into an error of far-reaching consequences, inevitably involving him in inconsistencies. He begins by pointing out that “the problems of Henry VIII.'s reign can indeed only be solved by realizing the misrule of the preceding century, the failure of parliamentary government, and the strength of the popular demand for a firm and masterful hand,” and that “in reality, love of freedom has not always been, nor will it always remain, the predominant note in the English mind. At times the English people have pursued it through battle

and murder with grim determination, but other times have seen other ideals. On occasion the demand has been for strong government irrespective of its methods, and good government has been preferred to self-government." But he proceeds to argue that "generally English ideals have been strictly subordinated to a passion for material prosperity," and that Henry "owed his strength to the skill with which he appealed to the weaknesses of a people whose prevailing characteristics were a passion for material prosperity and an absolute indifference to human suffering." The difficulty with this generalization is not simply that it is faulty, but that even were it sound it would explain little. For it is scarcely more than one way of saying that the Englishman of Tudor times, like the Englishman and every man of all times, responded to economic motives. As a matter of fact, it is easy to show that the Englishman of Henry's day was neither profoundly callous, as compared with his Continental fellows, nor peculiarly active in the pursuit of wealth. His distinctive traits were, rather, discontent, unrest, and depression. The nation was, as it were, neurasthenic. The Lancastrian wars had taken the heart out of the people, had—as Mr. Pollard suggests—disgusted them with the mediæval Parliament, had prepared them for the advent of a monarch who should be king in very fact. In the seventh Henry they found such a king, and the discovery did much to smooth his successor's path. But it by no means follows that they welcomed the Tudor absolutism because they were inspired by a predominating desire to set about the task of amassing wealth. They welcomed it because they were tired out, because their will was wearied and they realized the necessity for a guiding as well as a restraining hand.

It is obvious that if the key which unlocks the mystery of Henry VIII. is his watchful alertness to public opinion, public opinion cannot have been chiefly directed by a "passion for material prosperity." Henry's policy certainly does not indicate any compelling intention to give his land peace and plenty. He did not, to be sure, saddle it with expensive

wars, and the tax-gatherer was perhaps not so much in evidence as in previous reigns. But neither did he go out of his own very selfish way to make it rich. Had he done so, it is possible we should have heard less of Spain in the New World, though, it may be parenthetically remarked, the very fact that Spain enjoyed such primacy in discovery and exploration is eloquent testimony to the inertia of the Englishman of the days of bluff King Hal. That there was great distress throughout his reign is a matter of common knowledge. The dissolution of the monasteries, the inclosure evils which attended the transition from husbandry to grazing, the fall in the demand for labor, the debasement of the coinage—all combined to create, particularly in the agricultural sections, a situation of grinding want. Yet the King pursued his chosen road, secure in the hearts of his subjects. There were mutterings, there was even rebellion, but the King's ministers, not the King himself, were the objects of the people's wrath. A nation with a "passion for material prosperity" might conceivably have endured Henry for a few years; but it would never have supported him as it did support him throughout the stress of the breach with Rome.

It is true that Henry in part maintained himself by appealing to the weaknesses of his people. But he appealed also to their qualities, and not least to that innate love of freedom which, Mr. Pollard to the contrary notwithstanding, was an animating principle in the breast of even the war-worn Englishman of the early Tudor period. Curiously enough, Mr. Pollard strains every effort to prove that Henry's Parliament, through which he imposed his will on England, was an independent Parliament. That it was in fact one of the most subservient Parliaments in English history does not affect the truth that its master rested his policy on the love of freedom latent in the weary nation. It might not be free of him—it did not wish to be free of him—but it did wish to be free of outside interference, and more particularly of the interference of Rome. The English Reformation, as Mr. Pollard makes evident, was in the beginning a machine-

made revolution. That it became a living force in the nation was only very indirectly Henry's doing. If it was any individual's doing, it was his daughter Mary's. Before Henry died he had almost roused his fellow-countrymen from their lassitude. Mary—a bigot, but in many ways more deserving of sympathy than her father—galvanized England into renewed energy, and with the kindling of the martyrs' fagots lit a beacon that was to make of her sister's reign the most glorious in English annals—the reign that marked the dawning of a day that is not yet done.

To the tired nation—tired, but still cherishing its old-time traditions and already benefited by the New Despotism and the New Learning—came King Henry VIII., in April, 1509. Young, virile, handsome, of magnificent physique, open and genial of manner, gifted with many accomplishments—Mr. Pollard assures us that at least one anthem of his composition is to-day a favorite in English cathedrals—it is small wonder that his accession was hailed by an outburst of enthusiasm. His first act—the execution of the tools of his father's extortion—served only to increase the general rejoicing, while his marriage to Katherine of Aragon carried with it none of the forebodings that a Spanish match held for the Englishman of later times. Beloved by his people, endowed with a vigorous constitution, an indomitable will, limitless ambition, and a magnetic personality, Henry could confidently look forward to a long and prosperous reign that should redound to England's glory and his own—especially his own. Even in the beginning, even in those early years when, in unhappy Katherine's phrase, there was "continual feasting," selfishness marked Henry's every act. Mr. Pollard's judgment is severe but just: "He sought the greatness of England, and he spared no toil in the quest; but his labors were spent for no ethical purpose. His aims were selfish; his realm must be strong, because he must be great. He had the strength of a lion, and like a lion he used it." A sublime egotist, Henry is the egotist par excellence in unscrupulousness, dissimulation, and clarity of vision. This last

fact must be kept firmly in mind if we would understand him.

It has been universally recognized that a great source of his power lay in the wisdom with which he chose his ministers, the use he made of them, and the wakeful eye he held upon them. It is not so commonly perceived that if Wolsey, Cromwell, and the luckless rest who served his purpose all too well could never deceive him, he never deceived himself. His apologists have urged, in the matter of the divorce and many another deed of perfidy, that he was really actuated, as he professed to be, by an altruistic patriotism and the promptings of a sensitive conscience. Henry, sneers Arthur Innes with good reason, had "an unparalleled power of reconciling the dictates of desire and conscience." But Mr. Innes elsewhere ranges himself with those who affirm that the King's avowals were genuine in that they were the result of successful self-deception. This view is tenable only on the hypothesis that Henry was of unsound mind. Otherwise, how explain the ugly fact that his conscience never troubled him a whit in the mercilessness with which he pursued all who crossed his path, and the shameless ingratitude visited on those to whom he owed most? "My beloved queen," protested this man of conscience at the trial held for no other purpose than to dissolve the marriage, "I desire nothing so much as that our union be held valid despite the 'perpetual scruple' that has kept me silent so long." And the day after the beloved queen, the single figure whose reputation has come out of this tragedy unscathed, had breathed her last, the man of conscience could testify to the value of his protestations by appearing at a ball clad in yellow from head to heel. Figure again the man of conscience bringing another queen to the block and the next day preparing to wed once more—all for the sake of England. Unthinkable! In truth, there is no alternative between believing that bluff King Hal was not altogether sane, or that he was the most conspicuous example in the history of England of an utterly conscienceless, self-willed, selfish, and absolute monarch, whose success is to be

explained partly by his possession of almost preternatural powers of discernment and partly by the age in which he lived.

In any event, there is no denying that at precisely the period he flourished, Henry, with all his faults, was a blessing to England. "It is probable," Mr. Pollard reminds us, "that Henry's personal influence and personal action averted greater evils than those they provoked. Without him, the storm of the Reformation would still have burst over England; without him, it might have been far more terrible. Every drop of blood shed under Henry VIII. might have been a river under a feeble king. Instead of a stray execution here and there, conducted always with a scrupulous regard for legal forms, wars of religion might have desolated the land and swept away thousands of lives. London saw many a hideous sight in Henry's reign, but it had no cause to envy the Catholic capitals which witnessed the sack of Rome and the massacre of St. Bartholomew's; for all Henry's iniquities, multiplied manifold, would not equal the volume of murder and sacrilege wrought at Rome in May, 1527, or at Paris in August, 1572. From

such orgies of violence and crime England was saved by the strong right arm and the iron will of her Tudor king." In a far more vital sense did Henry—and Henry's ministers, Wolsey and Cromwell, to whom Mr. Pollard scarcely does justice—influence the course of events in England. However ignoble the rôle he played in the conflict between Catholicism and Protestantism, the intensity with which Henry pressed the cause he had espoused, and the fact that that cause—in so far, at any rate, as it meant the triumph of the laity over the clergy—represented the will of the people, combined to fan into activity the long smoldering but not wholly quenched embers of nationality. Wolsey's policy of the aggrandizement of England and of England's king operated to the same end, as did Cromwell's Machiavellian course. Henry, Wolsey, Cromwell—all three, however unwittingly, set in motion forces that, gaining impetus through the rigors of subsequent despotisms which failed to realize that the Tudors had put an end to the old order of things, ultimately made of the insignificant England of pre-Tudor times the mighty British Empire of to-day.

## THE PROPHET OF NAZARETH

FOR the Christ of the creeds Professor Schmidt, the accomplished Semitic scholar of whom Cornell University may be justly proud, substitutes in this volume the Christ of the critics. While a radical critic, he is a deeply religious critic. He contemplates the Christ of the creeds with reverence, and with gratitude to the great thinkers who limned his portrait. He is also, as not many of his school are, in sympathy with the Christian missionary spirit. But he affirms that "the old conception, with all its splendor, is no longer glorious because of the surpassing glory of the new." He finds that the Christology of the creeds, though based upon study of the Scriptures in the light of Christian experience, has become no longer tena-

ble. What the explorer's spade has done in recovering a buried civilization from beneath the soil of Babylonia has been done by the delving of scholars beneath the text of the Gospels. It is said that this in its present form is the product of the second century. Embedded in it may be seen the primitive tradition, on which have been superimposed the misunderstandings, the reflections, the speculations, and the inventions of a subsequent time. To recover the original source for a positive knowledge the surest way is to go back of our Greek text to the Aramaic language of Jesus and his Galilean disciples. The specially significant instance of this process is in the oft-recurring phrase, "Son of man," of whose original meaning Professor Schmidt, as in his article in the "Encyclopædia Biblica," was the first interpreter.

<sup>1</sup> *The Prophet of Nazareth*. By Nathaniel Schmidt. The Macmillan Company, New York. \$2.50.