HISTORICAL CHARACTERS OF THE REIGN OF QUEEN ANNE

BY

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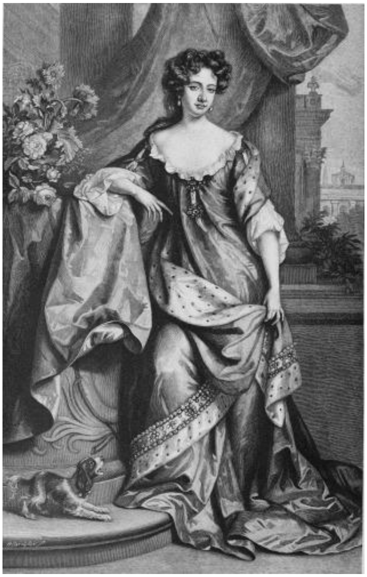

PRINCESS ANNE OF DENMARK.
ENGRAVED BY H. DAVIDSON, FROM MEZZOTINT BY JOHN SMITH, AFTER THE PAINTING BY W. WISSING AND I. VANDERVAART.

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THE REIGN OF QUEEN ANNE

CHAPTER I

THE PRINCESS ANNE

THE reign of Queen Anne is one of the most illustrious in English history. In literature it has been common to call it the Augustan age. In politics it has all the interest of a transition period, less agitating, but not less important, than the actual era of revolution. In war, it is, with the exception of the great European wars of the beginning of this century, the most glorious for the English arms of any that have elapsed since Henry V. set up his rights of conquest over France. Opinions change as to the advantage of such superiorities; and, still more, as to the glory which is purchased by bloodshed; yet, according to the received nomenclature, and in the language of all the ages, the time of Marlborough cannot be characterized as anything but glorious. A great general, statesmen of eminence, great poets, men of letters of the first distinction—these are points in which this period cannot easily be excelled. It pleases the fancy to step historically from queen to queen, and to find in each a center of national greatness knitting together the loose threads of the great web. “The spacious times of great Elizabeth” bulk larger and more magnificently in history than those of Anne, but the two eras bear a certain balance which is agreeable to the imagination. And we can scarcely help regretting that the great age of Wordsworth and Scott, Byron and Wellington, should not have been deferred long enough to make the reign of Victoria the third noblest period of modern English history. But time has here balked us. This age is not without its own greatness, but it is not the next in national sequence to that of Anne, as Anne’s was to that of Elizabeth.

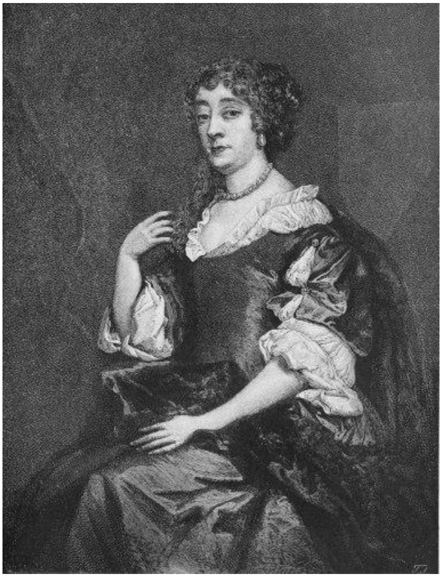
In the reigns of both these queens this country was trembling between two dynasties, scarcely yet removed from the convulsion of great political changes, and feeling that nothing but the life of the sovereign on the throne stood between it and unknown rulers and dangers to come. The deluge, in both cases, was ready to be let loose after the termination of the life of the central personage in the state. And thus the reign of Anne, like that of Elizabeth, was to her contemporaries the only piece of solid ground amid a sea of evil chances. What was to come after was clear to none.

But in the midst of its agitations and all its exuberant life—the wars abroad, the intrigues at home, the secret correspondences, the plots, the breathless hopes and fears—it is half ludicrous, half pathetic, to turn to the harmless figure of Queen Anne in the center of the scene—a fat, placid, middle-aged woman full of infirmities, with little about her of the picturesque yet artificial brightness of her time, and no gleam of reflection to answer to the wit and genius which have made her age illustrious. A monarch has the strangest fate in this respect: as long as she or he lives, the conscious center of everything whose notice elates and elevates the greatest; but as soon as his day is over, a mere image of state visible among his courtiers only as some unthought-of lackey or faded gentleman usher throws from his little literary lantern a ray of passing illumination upon him. The good things of their lives are thus almost counterbalanced by the insignificance of their historical position. Anne was one of the sovereigns who may, without too great a strain of hyperbole, be allowed to have been beloved in her day. She did nothing to repel the popular devotion. She was the best of wives, the most sadly disappointed of childless mothers. She made pecuniary sacrifices to the weal of her kingdom such as few kings or queens have thought of making. And she was a Stuart, Protestant, and safe, combining all the rights of the family with those of orthodoxy and constitutionalism, without even so much offense as lay in a foreign accent. There was indeed nothing foreign about her, a circumstance in her favor which she shared with the other great English queen regnant, who, like her, was English on both sides of the lineage.

All these points made her popular and, it might be permissible to say, beloved. If she had been indifferent to her father's deprivation, she had not at least shocked popular feeling by any immediate triumph in succeeding him, as Mary had done; and her mild Englishism was delightful to the people after grim William with his Dutch accent and likings. But the historians have not been kind to Anne. They have lavished ill names upon her: a stupid woman,—"a very weak woman, always governed blindly by some female favorite,"—nobody has a civil word to say for her. Yet there is a mixture of the amusing and the tragic in the appearance of this passive figure seated on high, presiding over all the great events of the epoch, with her humble feminine history, her long anguish of motherhood, her hopes so often raised and so often shattered, her stifled family feeling, her profound and helpless sense of misfortune.

There is one high light in the picture, however, though but one, and it comes from one of the rarest and highest sentiments of humanity: the passion of friendship, of which women are popularly supposed to be incapable, but which never existed in more complete and disinterested exhibition than in the bosom of this poor queen. It is sad that it should have ended in disloyalty and estrangement; but, curiously enough, it is not the breach of this close union, but the union itself, which has exposed Anne to the censure and contempt of all her biographers and historians. To an impartial mind we think few things can be more interesting than the position of these two female figures in the foreground of English life. Their friendship brought with it no harm to England; no scandal, such as lurks about the antechamber of kings, and which has made the name of a favorite one of the most odious titles of reproach, could attach in any way to such a relationship. And nothing could be better adapted to enhance the dramatic features of the scene than the contrast between the two friends whose union for many years was so intimate and so complete.

Yet her friend was as like to call forth such devotion as ever woman was. Seldom has there been a more brilliant figure in history than that of the great duchess, a woman beloved and hated as few have ever been; holding on one side in absolute devotion to her the greatest hero of the time, and on the other rousing to the height of adoration the mild and obtuse nature of her mistress; keeping her place on no ground but that of her own sense and spirit, amid all intrigues and opposition, for many of the most remarkable years of English history, and defending herself with such fire and eloquence when attacked, that her plea is as interesting and vivid as any controversy of to-day, and it is impossible to read it without taking a side, with more or less vehemence, in the exciting quarrel. Such a woman, standing like a beautiful Ishmael with every man's hand against her, yet fearing no man, and ready to meet every assailant, makes a welcome variety amid the historical scenes which so seldom exhibit anything so living, so imperious, so bold and free. That she has got little mercy and no indulgence, that all chivalrous sentiment has been mute in respect to her, and an angry ill-temper takes possession of every historian who names her name, rather adds to the interest than takes from it. Women in history, strangely enough, seem always to import into the chronicle a certain heat of personal feeling unusual and undesirable in that region of calm. Whether it is that the historian is impatient at finding himself arrested by the troublesome personalities of a woman, and that a certain resentment of her intrusion colors his appreciation of her, or that her appearance naturally possesses an individuality which breaks the line, it is difficult to tell; but the calmest chronicler becomes a partizan when he treats of Mary and Elizabeth, and no man can name Sarah of Marlborough without a heat of indignation or scorn, almost ridiculous, as being so long after date.



ANNE HYDE, DUCHESS OF YORK.
ENGRAVED BY T. JOHNSON, AFTER THE PAINTING BY SIR PETER LELY, IN POSSESSION OF EARL SPENCER.

To us the unfailing vivacity and spirit of the woman, the dauntless stand she makes, her determination not to be overcome, make her appearance always enlivening; and art could not have designed a more complete contrast than that of the homely figure by her side, with appealing eyes fixed upon her, a little bewildered, not always quick to understand—a woman born for other uses, but exposed all her harmless life to the fierce light that beats upon a throne. For her part, she has no defense to make, no word to say; let them spend all their jibes upon her, Anne knows no reply. Her slow understanding and want of perception give her a certain composure which in a queen answers very well for dignity; yet there is something whimsically pathetic, pitiful, incongruous in the fate which has placed her there, which can scarcely fail to soften the heart of the spectators.

The tragedy of Anne's life, unlike that of her friend, had no utterance, and there was nothing romantic in her appearance or surroundings to attract the lovers of the picturesque. Yet in the blank of her humble intellect she discharged not amiss the duties that were so much too great for her; and if she was disloyal to her friend in the end, that betrayal only adds another touch of pathos to the spectacle of helplessness and human weakness. It is only the favored few of mankind who are wiser and better, not feebler and less noble, as life draws toward its end.

Anne was, like Elizabeth, the daughter of a subject. Her mother, Anne Hyde, the daughter of the great Clarendon, though naturally subjected to the hot criticism of the moment on account of that virtue which refused anything less from her prince than the position of wife, was not a woman of much individual character, nor did she live long enough to influence much the training of her daughters. Historians have not hesitated to sneer at the prudence with which this young lady secured herself by marriage, when so many fairer than she were less scrupulous—a reproach which is somewhat unfair, considering what would certainly have been said of her had she not done so. Curiously enough, her own father, whether in sincerity or pretense, seems at the moment to have been her most severe critic, exculpating himself with unnecessary energy from all participation in the matter, and declaring that if it were true "the king should immediately cause the woman to be sent to the Tower" till Parliament should have time to pass an act cutting off her head. It would appear, however, from the contemporary narratives of Pepys and Evelyn that he was not so bad as his words, for he seems to have supported and shielded his daughter during the period of uncertainty which preceded the acknowledgment of her marriage, and to have shared in the general satisfaction afterward. But this great marriage was not of much advantage to her family. It did not hinder Clarendon's disgrace and banishment, nor were his sons after him anything advantaged by their close relationship to two queens.

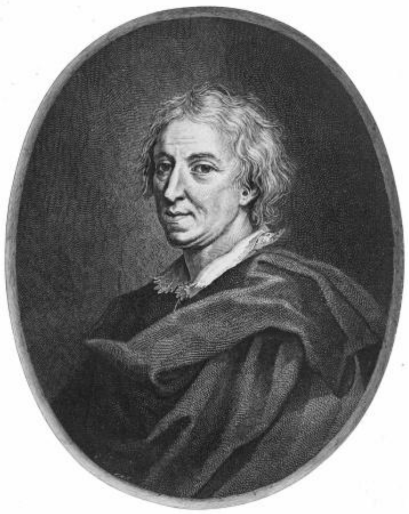
The Duchess of York does not seem to have been remarkable in any way. She is said to have governed her husband; and she died a Roman Catholic,—the first of the royal family to lead the way in that fatal particular: but did not live long enough to affect the belief or training of her children.

There was an interval of three years in age between Mary and Anne. The eldest, Mary, was like the Stuarts, with something of their natural grace of manner; the younger was a fair English child, rosy and plump and blooming; in later life they became more like each other. But the chief thing they inherited from their mother was what is called in fine language, "a tendency to embonpoint," with, it is said, a love of good eating, which helped to produce the other peculiarity.

The religious training of the princesses is the first thing we hear of them. They were put under the charge of a most orthodox tutor, Compton, Bishop of London, with much haste and ostentation—their uncle, Charles II., probably feeling with his usual cynicism that the sop of two extra-Protestant princesses would please the people, and that the souls of a couple of girls could not be of much importance one way or another. How they fared in respect to the other features of education is not recorded. Lord Dartmouth, in his notes on Bishop Burnet's history, informs us that King Charles II., struck by the melodious voice of the little Lady Anne, had her trained in elocution by Mrs. Barry, an actress; while Colley Cibber adds that she and her sister were instructed by the well-known Mrs. Betterton to take their parts in a little court performance when Anne was but ten and Mary thirteen; but whether these are two accounts of the same incident, or refer to distinct events, seems doubtful.

The residence of the girls was chiefly at Richmond, where they were under the charge of Lady Frances Villiers, who had a number of daughters of her own, one of whom, Elizabeth, went with Mary to Holland, and was, in some respects, her evil genius. We have, unfortunately, no court chronicle to throw any light upon the lively scene at Richmond, where this little bevy of girls grew up together, conning their divinity, whatever other lessons might be neglected; taking the air upon the river in their barges; following the hounds in the colder season, for this robust exercise seems to have been part of their training. When their youthful seclusion was broken by such a great event as the court mask, in which they played their little parts,—Mrs. Blogge, the saintly beauty, John Evelyn's friend, Godolphin's wife, acting the chief character, in a blaze of diamonds,—or that state visit to the city when King Charles in all his glory took the girls, his heirs, with him, no doubt the old withdrawing-rooms and galleries of Richmond rang with the story for weeks after. Princess Mary, her mind perhaps beginning to own a little agitation as to royal suitors, would have other distractions; but as to the Lady Anne, it soon came to be her chief holiday when the young Duchess of York, her stepmother, came from town in her chariot, or by water, in a great gilded barge breasting up the stream, to pay the young ladies a visit. For in the train of that princess was the young maid of honor, a delightful, brilliant *espiègle*, full of spirit and wilfulness, who bore the undistinguished name of Sarah Jennings, and brought with her such life and stir and movement as dispersed the dullness wherever she went.

There is no such love as a young girl's adoration for a beautiful young woman, a little older than herself, whom she can admire and imitate and cling to, and dream of with visionary passion. This was the kind of sentiment with which the little princess regarded the bright and animated creature in her young stepmother's train. Mary of Modena was herself only a few years older than her stepchildren. They were all young together, accustomed to the perpetual gaiety of the court of Charles II., though, let us hope, kept apart from its license, and no shadow of fate seems to have fallen upon the group of girls in their early peaceful days. Anne in particular would seem to have been left to hang upon the arm and bask in the smiles of her stepmother's young lady in waiting at her pleasure—with many a laugh at premature favoritism. "We had used to play together when she was a child," said the great duchess long after. "She even then expressed a particular fondness for me; this inclination increased with our years. I was often at court, and the princess always distinguished me by the pleasure she took to honor me preferably to others with her conversation and confidence. In all her parties for amusement, I was sure by her choice to be one."



JOHN EVELYN.
ENGRAVED BY E. HEINEMANN, AFTER COPPERPLATE BY F. BARTOLOZZI IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM.

Mistress Sarah was one of the actors in the mask above referred to; she was in the most intimate circle of the Duke of York's household, closely linked to all its members, in that relationship, almost as close as kindred, which binds a court together.

And no doubt it added greatly to the attractions which the bright and animated girl exercised over her playmates and companions, that she had already a romantic love-story, and, at a period when matches were everywhere arranged, as at present in continental countries, by the parents, made a secret marriage, under the most romantic circumstances, with a young hero already a soldier of distinction. He was not an irreproachable hero. Court scandal had not spared him. He was said to have founded his fortune upon the bounty of one of the shameless women of Charles's court. But the imagination of the period was not over-delicate, and probably had he not become so great a man, and acquired so many enemies, we should have heard little of John Churchill's early vices. About his sister, Arabella Churchill, unfortunately there could not be any doubt; and it is a curious instance of the sudden efflorescence now and then of a race which neither before nor after is of particular note, that Marlborough's sister should have been the mother of that one illustrious Stuart who might, had he been legitimate, have changed the fortunes of the house—the Duke of Berwick. Had she, instead of Anne Hyde, been James's duchess, what a difference might have been made in history! Nobody had heard of the Churchills before—they have not been a distinguished race since. It is curious that they should have produced, all unawares, without preparation or warning, the two greatest soldiers of the age.

Young Churchill was attached to the Duke of York's service, as Sarah Jennings was to that of the duchess. He had served abroad with distinction. In 1672, when France and England for once, in a way, were allies against Holland, he had served under the great Turenne, who called him "my handsome Englishman," and vaunted his gallantry. He was but twenty-two when he thus gave proofs of his future greatness. When he returned, after various other exploits, and resumed his court service, the brilliant maid of honor, whom the little princess adored, attained a complete dominion over the spirit of the young soldier. There were difficulties about the marriage, for he had no fortune, and his provident parents had secured an heiress for him. But it was at length accomplished so secretly that even the bride was never quite certain of the date, in the presence and with the favor of Mary of Modena herself. Sarah, if the dates are correct, must have been eighteen at this period, and her little princess fourteen. What a delightful interruption to the dullness of Richmond to hear all about it when the Duchess of York came with her train and the two girls could wander away together in some green avenue till Lady Frances sent a page or an usher after them!

Mary of Modena must have been a lover of romances, and true love also, though her youth had fallen to such a gruesome bridegroom as James Stuart; for not only Sarah Jennings and her great general, who were to have so great a hand in keeping that poor lady's son from his kingdom, but Mary Blogge and her statesman, who was to rule England so wisely in the interest of the opposing side, were both secretly married under the young duchess's wing, she helping, planning, and sanctioning the secret. How many additional bitternesses must this have put into her cup when she was sitting, a shadow queen, at St.-Germain, and all those people whom she had loved and caressed were swaying the fortunes of England! And who can tell what tender recollections of his secret wedding and the sweet and saintly prude whom King James's young wife gave him, may have touched the soul of Godolphin in those hankerings after his old master—if it were not, as scandal said, to his old mistress—which moved him from time to time, great minister as he was, almost to the verge of treachery! The Churchills, it must be owned, showed little gratitude to their royal patrons.

When the Princess Mary married and went to Holland with her husband, the position of her sister at home became a more important one. Anne was not without some experience of travel and those educational advantages which the sight of foreign countries are said to bring. She went to The Hague to visit her sister. She accompanied her father, sturdy little Protestant as she was, when he was in disgrace for his religious views, and spent some time in Brussels, from which place she wrote to one of the ladies about the court a letter which has been preserved,—with just as much and as little reason as any other letter of a fifteen-year-old girl with her eyes about her, at a distance of two hundred years,—in which the young lady describes a ball she had seen, herself *incognita*, at which some gentlemen "danced extremely well—as well if not better than the Duke of Monmouth or Sir E. Villiers, which I think is very extraordinary," says the girl, no doubt sincerely believing that the best of all things was to be found at home. She had little difficulties about her spelling, but that was common enough. "As for the town," says the Princess Anne, "methinks tho' the streets are not so clean as in Holland, yet they are not so dirty as ours; they are very well paved and very easy—they only have od smells." This is a peculiarity which has outlived her day, and it would seem to imply that England, even before the invention of sanitary science, was superior in this respect at least to the towns of the Continent.

After these unusual dissipations Anne remained in the shade until she married, in 1683, George, Prince of Denmark, a perfectly inoffensive and insignificant person, to whom she gave, during the rest of her life, a faithful, humdrum, but unbroken attachment, such as shows to little advantage in print, but makes the happiness of many a home. This marriage was another sacrifice to the Protestantism of England, and in that point of view pleased the people much. King Charles, glad to satisfy the country by any act

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