



“HENRY VIII.” ON THE STAGE.

By FREDERICK HAWKINS.

THE fact that Shakspeare's *Henry VIII.* is on the point of appearing at the Lyceum may be accepted as a sufficient reason for reviewing the stage-history of that sometimes puzzling play—puzzling on account of its differences of style, which have led a few acute and scholarly critics to assign portions of it to Fletcher. Mr. Irving, as the representative actor of his time, arouses a new and special interest in what he revives, however time-worn and familiar it may be. He gives us *Faust*, and before it goes out of his bill more than 100,000 copies of it are sold in this country. His latest undertaking is not likely to prove an exception to the rule; and many readers of this magazine may feel curious to know how far the opportunities which the work offers for impressive acting and imposing pageantry have been utilized in the past.

If probabilities may be trusted, *Henry VIII.* first saw the light at the Globe on June 29, 1613, the day on which that historic theatre was burnt to the ground. Several pieces dealing with the same reign had appeared within the last fourteen or fifteen years, such as the *Life and Death of Cardinal Wolsey*, supposed to have been written by Henry Chettle, and Samuel Rowley's *When you see me you know me*, or the *Famous Chronicle Historie of King Henry VIII., with the Birth and Virtuouse Life of Edward Prince of Wales*. With regard to the cast of Shakspeare's play, Lowen is said to have represented the King, and it is by no means improbable that Burbage—who, with Heminge and Condell, is shown to have been in the performance—took unto himself the more important part of the Cardinal. “I will entertain you at the present,” writes Sir Henry Wotton to his nephew a day or two afterwards, “with what happened this week at the Bank's side. The King's players had a new play entitled *All is True*, representing some principal pieces of the reign of Henry VIII., which was set forth with many extraordinary circumstances of pomp and majesty, even to the matting of the stage; the knights of the order with their Georges and Garter, the guards with their embroidered coats and the like, sufficient in truth with a while to make greatness very familiar, if not ridiculous. Now, King Henry making a masque at the Cardinal Wolsey's house, and certain cannons being shot off at his entry, some of the paper, or other stuff wherewith one of them was stopped, did light on the thatch, where, being thought at first but an idle smoke, and their eyes being more attentive to the show, it kindled inwardly, and ran round like a train, consuming, within less than an hour, the whole house to the very ground. This was the fatal period of that virtuous fabric, wherein nothing did perish but wood and straw, and a few forsaken cloaks; only one man had his breeches set on fire, that would perhaps have broiled him, if he had not, by the benefit of a provident

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wit, put it out with bottled ale." Thomas Lorkin, in a letter addressed to Sir Thomas Pickering on "this last of June," says: "No longer since than yesterday, while Burbage his company were acting at the Globe the play of *Henry VIII.*, and there shooting of certayne chambers [small cannon] in way of triumph, the fire catch'd." That the innocent cause of the disaster was Shakspeare's historical drama, probably with *All is True* as one of its titles, is a matter beyond reasonable dispute. For signs of this we have only to refer to Howe's continuation of Stowe's *Chronicles*, the pointed use of "truth" and "true" in the prologue, the ballad on "the pittifull burneing of the



HARRIS AS CARDINAL WOLSEY. FROM A RARE MEZZOTINT IN THE PEPSYIAN LIBRARY, CAMBRIDGE, AFTER A PICTURE BY GREENHILL.

Globeplayhouse," and the fact that the above quoted accounts of the origin of the fire agree with the stage direction in the fourth scene of the first act.

With the chief questions raised by Shaksperian critics and experts respecting *Henry VIII.* we are not at present concerned. It may, however, be asked whether Sir Henry Wotton fell into an error in describing it as a *new* play? Malone and others, believing that the only novelty attending it in that year was its title, decorations, and perhaps the prologue and epilogue, assigned the date of the first production to the end of Elizabeth's reign, or at the latest to the beginning of that of her successor. In Elze's view, "this play, with its apology for Henry VIII., its glorification of Anne Boleyn, and its apotheosis of Elizabeth, was written, not

only in Elizabeth's reign, but for some festive occasion." It is suggested that an "entlude of King Henry VIII." in the Stationers' Register for 1605 was really Shakspeare's work, that the references to James I. and the colonisation of Virginia were interpolated after the lapse of some years, and that Sir Henry Wotton may not have seen the piece before the performance which met with so calamitous an interruption. None of these arguments can be accepted as conclusive. As to the first, it is more likely that the interlude mentioned in the Stationers' Register in 1605 was Rowley's *When you see me you know me*, the original edition of which appeared in that very year. *Pace* Schlegel, the prophecy as to James I. and "new nations" does not have the look of an awkwardly made addition, even when the confusing "she" in the fifty-seventh line of the scene is borne in mind. Lastly, Sir Henry Wotton, as a lettered man of the world, could hardly have been expected, especially in the case of a writer so well

known to fame as Shakspeare was, to mistake a play about ten years old for a brand new one. So much for the arguments in favour of an early date. The evidence for a late date, as set forth by Mr. Stokes in his *Chronological Order of Shakspeare's Plays*, is somewhat more to the point. The piece was of a nature to annoy rather than please the Queen. It could not but arouse sympathy for Katharine of Arragon; it did not always exhibit Henry or Anne Boleyn in a flattering light. As Professor Ward remarks, Elizabeth would not have endured being called an "aged princess," nor would she have allowed herself to be brought on the stage as an infant. Essex's dying speech is echoed in Buckingham's, and Mr. Stokes pertinently asks whether this would have been done in her reign. A few passages are apparently in allusion to events which occurred long after her death, "some strange Indian" being ascribable to the visit of five Indians to England in 1611. The play is spoken of in the prologue as new, and the metrical tests go to prove that the bulk of it is late work. Weighing both sides of the question, we can hardly resist the conclusion that this "historie" was a production of the year 1613, if not the swan-song of its "myriad-minded" author.

Henry VIII. had a place among the Shaksperian revivals of the Restoration era. It was brought out at the Duke's Theatre, Lincoln's Inn Fields, towards the end of 1663, with Betterton as the King, Harris as the Cardinal, Smith as Buckingham, Nokes as Norfolk, Lilliston as Suffolk, Medbourne as Campeius and Cranmer, Underhill as Gardiner, and Mrs. Betterton as the Queen. The *mise-en-scène* seems to have been particularly effective. Downes, in his *Roscius Anglicanus*, says that this "play, by order of Sir William Davenant," the manager, "was all new cloath'd in proper habits: the King's was new, all the Lords, the Cardinals, the Bishops, the doctors, proctors, lawyers, tip-staves: new scenes." Indeed, the care bestowed upon the production was so marked as to arouse a suspicion nowadays that the piece had been altered by Davenant for the occasion, and that a sort of parental feeling was at work in its favour. Other circumstances may be cited in support of this idea. He could tamper even with such a masterpiece as *Macbeth*, not only in metre and diction, but in its groundwork and characters. He was mentioned out of doors as the author, since Mr. Pepys, calling upon his shoemaker, heard something of "a rare play to be acted this week of Sir William Davenant's—the story of Henry VIII. and all his wives." Be this as it may, the piece had exceptional success. It was represented fourteen consecutive times—in those days a long run—with "general applause." Pepys describes it as "much cried up." Not that the diarist himself was among its admirers. Though he "went with a resolution to like it," he thought it "so simple a thing, made up of a great many patches, that, besides the shows and processions in it, there is nothing in the world good or well done." This censure, however, must be taken with a grain of salt. We may safely assume that at least two of the principal players reached a high level of excellence. "The part of the King," says Downes, "was so right and justly done by Mr. Betterton, he being instructed in it by Sir William, who had it from old Mr. Lowen, that had his instructions from Mr. Shakespeare himself, that I dare and will aver, none can or will come near him in this age in the performance of that part." According to the same authority, "Mr. Harris's performance of Cardinal Wolsey was little inferior to that, he doing it with such just state, port and mien, that I dare affirm none hitherto has equalled him." His name would seem to have been long associated with the Cardinal, as one of the portraits of him by Hailes represents him in the character. A print from another picture is now in the Pepysian library at Cambridge, the custodians of which have courteously permitted me to reproduce it in the present article.

For more than the next half century, as far as we can tell, *Henry VIII.* received but scant attention, if any attention at all, from the players. No farther trace of it is to be found until the beginning of 1707. Meanwhile, however, the King, Wolsey, and Anne Boleyn appeared in a tragedy by John Banks, *Virtue Betrayed*, brought out at the theatre in Dorset Gardens in 1682. The first was played by Smith, the second by Gillow, and the third by Mrs. Barry. Conjoined with them here is the figure of Percy (Betterton). The plot turns upon the attachment between him and Anne Boleyn, which, in defiance of indubitable history, is represented as lasting after her marriage to Henry. Though written in the author's usual style, the tragedy met with rather a favourable reception, the final scenes melting most of the women in the

theatre to tears. In it we come upon one of those fulsome adulations of the monarchical principle which, to the delight of Charles II., occurred in so many plays of the time :—

" This maxim still
Shall be my guide : a Prince can do no ill.
In spite of slaves his genius let him trust,
For heav'n ne'er made a King but made him just."

But to return to Shakspeare's play. The performance of 1707 took place at the Haymarket Theatre, then in the hands of Owen MacSwiney. Betterton was again the King, and among his colleagues were Verbruggen (Wolsey), Barton Booth (Buckingham), Mills (Norfolk), Colley Cibber (Surrey), Mrs. Bradshaw (Anne Boleyn), and Mrs. Barry (Katharine). In 1722, at Drury Lane, Booth succeeded Betterton as Henry, the Queen being represented by Mrs. Porter. The company on this occasion included Cibber, Wilks, Mills, and Johnson (the last, no doubt, as Gardiner). About the same time the play was given at the Lincoln's Inn Fields theatre for the sake of Quin, who as the King found a means of enlarging what soon became a national reputation.

Remarkable for several reasons was a revival of *Henry VIII.* at Drury Lane in 1727. George II. had just come to the throne, and the managers, mindful of the interest excited by the ceremony in Westminster Abbey, appended to the performance a scene representing the coronation of Anne Boleyn. With one exception, the principal parts must have been sufficiently filled. Booth was Henry, Mrs. Porter the Queen, Wilks the Duke of Buckingham, and Colley Cibber the Cardinal. In the words of Theophilus Cibber, Booth "gave full scope to the humour without dropping the dignity of the King. When he appeared most familiar he was by no means vulgar ; when angry his eye spoke majestic terror. He gave the full idea of the arbitrary prince who thought himself born to be obeyed. His 'Go thy ways, Kate,' was marked by a happy emphasis. When he said 'And now to your breakfast with what appetite you may,' his expression was rapid and vehement, his look tremendous." Wilks, too, was quite at home as Buckingham. "In the first scene," says Davies, "his resentment and indignation at Wolsey broke out with suitable impetuosity ; his action was vehement, and his motion quick and disturbed. His demeanour when condemned was simple, graceful, and pathetic ; his grief was manly, resigned, and temperate." Mrs. Porter had a bad voice, but nevertheless rose to a remarkable height of pathos as well as dignity. Cibber's Cardinal, though not without good points, may be deemed the chief blot of the production. It was wanting, Davies tells us, "in that easy dignity of deportment which a man like Wolsey, so familiar with the greatest courts of Europe, and taking the lead in the councils and designs of mighty monarchs, must have acquired. His pride and passion were impotent and almost farcical, his grief and resignation and tenderness were inadequately expressed, and when he said—

" This candle burns not clear ; 'tis I must snuff it ;
Then out it goes——"

he imitated with his forefinger and thumb the extinguishing of a candle with a pair of snuffers." For the genial Colley did not always know a metaphor when he saw one. But if the acting had been generally defective the success of the venture was certain. Like the royal family, all London went to revel in the coronation scene, on which the managers were said to have spent a large sum, and which, perhaps, was the most elaborate pageant yet witnessed on the public stage in this country. To a large majority of playgoers, sad to relate, it formed the best part of the entertainment. For example, when *Henry VIII.* had ceased to attract them on its own account, the spectacle was added to a "great number of tragedies and comedies," usually with the happiest results to the exchequer of the theatre. One of the pieces it followed was *Virtue Betrayed*, in which Booth appeared as the King, Wilks as Henry, and Mrs. Oldfield as Anne Boleyn. It may seem strange that the audience should have been treated to a sight of the Queen's coronation after her death, but let that pass. In consenting to the substitution of *Virtue Betrayed* for *Henry VIII.*, of course, Booth did not act of his own free will. "Bah!" he contemptuously exclaimed, "Banks's Henry is a part I can play with in comparison with Shakspeare's." No such piece of

luck as the coronation-scene had previously fallen to the lot of Drury Lane, Colley Cibber, in the course of the evidence he gave in the action instituted in the name of Steele against his fellow-managers, stating that for forty nights it “brought them more money than the best play that was ever writ.”

Another long period was to pass away before *Henry VIII.* again acquired anything like prominence in theatrical history. George II., it is true, liked the pageant well enough to command three performances of it in one winter. “Indeed,” said Steele, “I was afraid of losing all my actors, was not sure that the King would not get them to fill the posts at court that he saw them so fitted for in the performance.” But this royal patronage did not save the play from falling into comparative neglect. Garrick thought it as little worthy of his notice as the parts of Shylock and Sir Giles Over-

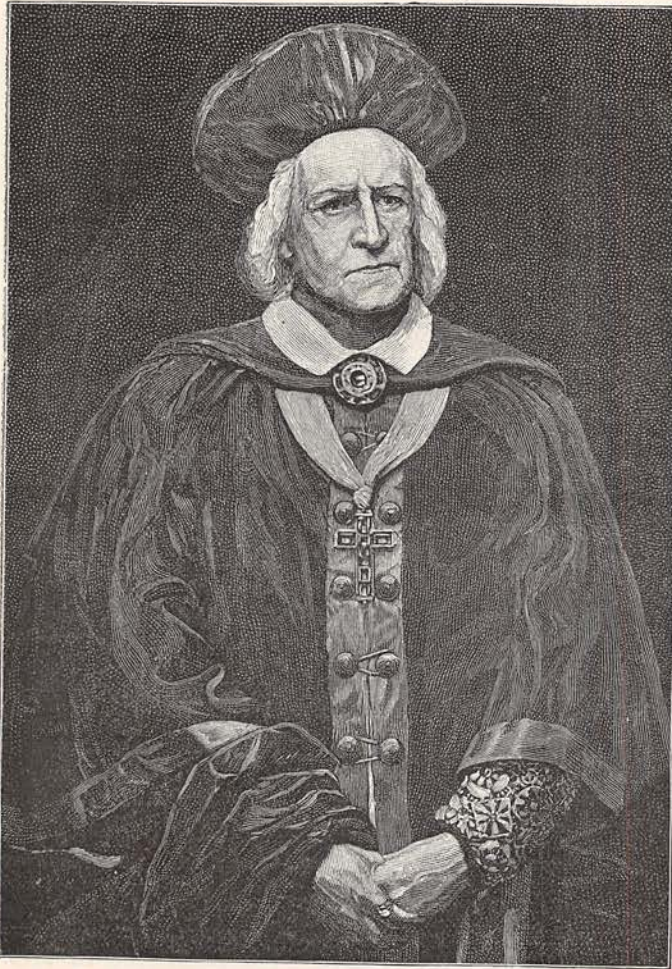


THE KEMBLE FAMILY IN THE SCENE OF THE TRIAL OF QUEEN KATHERINE. FROM A MEZZOTINT BY CLINT, AFTER THE PICTURE BY G. H. HARLOW, IN THE POSSESSION OF MRS. MORRISON, OF BASILDON PARK.

reach. In 1738 and 1744 Quin played the King at Drury Lane and Covent Garden respectively, at the latter house to the Wolsey of Ryan, the Katharine of Mrs. Pritchard, and the Gardiner of Hippiisley. The “ceremony of the coronation” came after the performance. It is easy to believe that the Queen was represented with the finest effect. After this the piece does not grace the bills until 1772-3, when it was given at the same theatre in a slightly altered form. In 1777 it appeared at the Haymarket, with Parsons, a low comedian who could never be serious, as the icy, stern, relentless Gardiner. The explanation of this peculiar instance of a round peg in a square hole is to be found in the fact that since the days of Johnson it had been customary to interlard the scene of the forced reconciliation between the Primate and the Bishop with as much buffoonery as possible. Three years later, at Covent Garden, an important change in the method of treating *Henry VIII.* was made. Hitherto, as we have seen, the great players had regarded the character of the King as the most conspicuous and grateful of all. Henderson, who occupied the highest place in the theatre, deliberately elected to play the Cardinal, and by doing so, of course, showed that he was better acquainted with his author than Betterton, Booth, or Quin had been. His impersonation is described as marked by his usual accuracy

of elocution, but as deficient here and there in dignity. However that may be, he afforded a signal proof of the value of the part in capable hands, and thenceforward no actor of the first rank ever thought of disregarding the precedent thus set. It may be added that in this performance Clarke was the King, and Miss Younge, the last actress with whom Garrick played tragedy, the Katharine.

The memorable connexion of the Kemble family with *Henry VIII.* began at Drury Lane in the autumn of 1788, when Mrs. Siddons, by far the most gifted of the number, flashed upon the town as the Queen. John Kemble, though a well-established



PHELPS AS CARDINAL WOLSEY. FROM THE PICTURE BY J. FORBES ROBERTSON.

favourite in London, was here content to play the comparatively small character of Cromwell, the King being assigned to Palmer, the Cardinal to Bensley, and Gardiner to Dicky Suet. Mrs. Siddons's Katharine, there can be no doubt, was distinctly a great achievement. Her regal demeanour, her keen appreciation of dramatic beauty, her deep-toned utterance, her wonderful power of facial expression, her not inconsiderable command of pathos, must have given the performance an abiding place in the memories of those who saw and heard it. Her triumph in this case may have been increased by a special interest which she took in her task. "Which of Shakspeare's heroines do you like best?" Johnson had asked her five years or so previously. "Queen Katharine," she replied without hesitation; "it is the most natural and feminine." "You are right, madam," said the doctor; "and when you appear in that part, old and infirm as I am, I will endeavour to hobble out

and see you." John Kemble first appeared as Wolsey in 1806, during his management of Covent Garden theatre. He had the support of Mrs. Siddons as the Queen, of Pope as the King, and of Charles Kemble as Cromwell. Unfortunately for his reputation among Shaksperian scholars in these days, he had thought it necessary to revise the play throughout, in some measure by the light of the prompt-book used in 1772. Besides minor tamperings with the text, he changed the "old lady" into Lady Denny, merged several characters in that of Sir Henry Guildford, and, above all, left out, among other valuable and even important things, the interview between the Queen and the two Cardinals at the beginning of the third act. How Mrs. Siddons could have reconciled herself to the loss of such an aid to effect it is impossible to understand. As for the mounting of the play, it was elaborate rather than correct. Kemble professed to have a great regard for something like appropriateness of costume, but this

did not prevent him from dressing the bishops at the outset of the piece as Protestants, any more than it prevented him from adorning himself with the Garter when he played Hotspur. The blemishes of the revival, however, were to a large extent atoned for by his acting, which, joined to his sister's incomparable Katharine, brought *Henry VIII.* into a greater vogue than it had enjoyed since the Restoration. He went far to meet the demands of the part, whether as to its dignity, irony, or final pathos. In reciting the metaphor of the candle, we are told, he did not imitate the movement of Colley Cibber, but at the same time "seemed to smell a stink"—an idea which may be safely ascribed to an excessive exercise of the imagination. It is needless to say that Cromwell and Griffith (absurdly rolled into one part) received full expression from Charles Kemble, one of the most earnest and spirited and graceful of actors.

Edmund Kean, Macready, and Phelps added the character of Wolsey to their ample *répertoires*, the first undertaking it at Drury Lane in 1822, the second at the same theatre shortly afterwards, and the third during his eventful management of Sadler's Wells. Kean, as I have pointed out elsewhere, was more vigorous and impressive in the exhibition of the Cardinal's fall than of his proud and lofty bearing in the fulness of his power. During the first two acts, where Wolsey has little to say and less to do, the actor was comparatively unsuccessful. To look dignified without the auxiliary of a dialogue pertained to a line of performance in which he was not always at home. Here, and especially in the banquet scene, the audience must have felt the absence of John Kemble, who had then been living in retirement for five years. But in the third act, where the Cardinal's stately and somewhat querulous impassiveness gives place to an impassioned fervour, Kean's conception made it unnecessary to think of any one, at least in the way of regret. Wounded pride, humiliation, and penitence were blended with a degree of talent altogether matchless; a perfect expression of the decay which in the hour of disaster may seize mind and body at the same moment pervaded the whole of his adversity. Macready states that Wolsey was among his most favourite Shaksperian assumptions, but the effect he created in it does not appear to have corresponded to all his anticipations. Phelps's acting, as Mr. Henry Morley well pointed out in the *Examiner*, was "remarkable for the impression of power subtly given through a marked quietness of demeanour. He moved easily, as a Cardinal familiar with courts, and meekly, except in the first proud glance at defiant Buckingham, and in the short scene wherein Wolsey, left alone with Campeius, lays aside his mask and shows the proud face underneath it. He sat still under the imputations cast upon him by Katharine when she told the king of the exactions suffered by his subjects. He was as quiet at Blackfriars; and it would have puzzled many shrewd critics to define how, by gesture, turn of the head, and nice management of voice, the proud, ambitious spirit made itself felt in that unobtrusive figure." Before leaving this part of my subject I have to thank Mr. Forbes Robertson for allowing me to give a copy of his expressive and finished portrait of Phelps as the Cardinal, now one of the treasures of the Garrick Club.

But the most striking revival of *Henry VIII.* in the present century has yet to be noticed. I refer, of course, to what was accomplished by Charles Kean at the Princess's Theatre in 1855. "It will be perceived," he wrote in his usual flyleaf, "that I have ventured to differ from the stage arrangements of my predecessors. Although in their time fine scenic effects were produced, and much pageantry was displayed, the management did not attempt, nor did the public require, that scrupulous adherence to historical truth in costume, architecture, and the multiplied details of action which modern taste demands, and is so capable of appreciating when employed in the service of the monarch of dramatic poetry." Nor did he fail to realize the ideal revealed in these sentences. He set before the audience a surprisingly exact representation of Tudor court life in the first half of the sixteenth century. Instead of being content with isolated effects, as others had been, he provided the piece with a continuous succession of historical pictures, each betokening the most careful research. And some of these pictures were stage spectacles of the most imposing character. Wolsey's procession to the council chamber, the banquet at York Place, the execution of Buckingham, the trial of the Queen at Blackfriars, and the vision of the descent of angels in the fourth act,—all marked a distinct advance upon previous achievements in this way. The arrangement of the trial scene, too, was better

than that indicated in Harlow's picture of the Kemble family, who appear to have lost sight of the ecclesiastical character and authority of the court. The two cardinals, far from being mixed up with other members of the council at the table, rightly sat together on an elevated bench, while the King, as plaintiff in the cause, occupied the right-hand side in front. In the fifth act, there having already been two processions, the spectators were transported to Greenwich, the scene of the christening ceremony, by means of a moving panorama. Unlike his immediate predecessors, Kean gave the play as Shakspeare wrote it, a few necessary curtailments and modifications excepted. The acting called for high praise. Mrs. Charles Kean reappeared after a long illness as the Queen, and, with the help of the restored scene in the third act, added another flower to her already heavy chaplet. Her delineation was extremely refined and touching, the queen being to a large extent sunk in the woman. "In her last scene," Mr. Oxenford wrote, "the attitude in which, half rising from her couch, she followed with her eyes the departing forms, might serve for some picture of a saint's 'ecstasy.'" Charles Kean's Wolsey enjoyed



CHARLES KEAN. FROM A PHOTOGRAPH BELONGING TO MR. JOSEPH HURST, TAKEN ABOUT 1860.

the distinction of being the only performance in which he equalled his illustrious father. He interested the audience in the Cardinal's prosperity as much as in his adversity, finely as the closing scenes were given. No less admiration was excited by Mr. Walter Lacy's Henry VIII., a portrait that could hardly have been excelled either by Betterton or by Booth. Ryder appeared as Buckingham, Miss Heath as Anne Boleyn, and Cooper as the resuscitated Griffith. In a word, little was wanting to the completeness of the revival, which had the unexpectedly long run of one hundred consecutive nights.

Some years afterwards, in America, Charlotte Cushman included Wolsey among the impersonations of male characters by which she surprised and delighted her audience. Her acting is said by one critic to have reminded old playgoers of the times of Kean and Macready.

Nor has the figure of King Henry been altogether unfamiliar to French playgoers through the medium of the stage. In

1642, when Corneille was at the summit of his reputation, Puget de Laserre brought out at the Palais Cardinal a tragedy entitled *Thomas Morus; ou, Le Triomphe de la Foi et de la Constance*. It relates chiefly to Henry's passion for Anne, on whom the most elevated sentiments are bestowed. Like other productions of the same pen, *Thomas Morus* did not rise above mediocrity, but enjoyed a large measure of success. The whole of the court, headed by Richelieu, united in singing its praises. On one occasion the crowd of fine gentlemen at the doors was so dense and eager that four doorkeepers lost their lives. "Aha!" cried the author in reference to this tragic incident, "there is an example of a good play for you! M. Corneille can boast of no such proof of popularity, and until he has had *five* doorkeepers killed in one day I shall not allow him to be my superior!" During the Revolution, a *Henri VIII.* by Marie Joseph Chénier appeared at the theatre in the Rue de Richelieu, Talma representing the King. As might have been expected from the anti-monarchical fervour of the author, who had already made himself famous by his *Charles IX.*, the chief character is painted in the darkest colours. The plot deals with the fall of Anne Boleyn, and some effect is produced by a scene in which Jane Seymour, holding in her arms the little daughter of the doomed Queen, tearfully endeavours to move the King, of whom she stands in no little dread, from his fell purpose.

Mr. Irving has the good wishes of all lovers of the stage in his coming enterprise.