

From *Calendar of State Papers Relating to English Affairs in the Archives of Venice, vol. 4, 1527-1533*, edited by Rawdown Brown. London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1864, pp. 292-301.

Nov. 10 [1531]
Report of England
Venetian Archives

694. REPORT OF ENGLAND, MADE TO THE SENATE BY LODOVICO FALIER¹

Will divide his narrative into two parts: the one relating to his journey, the other to the great eminence (*altezza*) of Henry VIII., the mode of living in his kingdom, and its government, as he found it from 1528 to 1531.

Left Venice in the middle of September 1528, and by way of Savoy and Lyons proceeded to Paris, where King Francis told him that unless the Emperor condescended to fair terms of peace, he would wage war most briskly against him, and that he had already engaged many Swiss commanders.

Quitted Paris for England on the 10th of December. Was met at St. George's, five miles from London, by his predecessor, Venier, and many persons in the name of the King and Cardinal Wolsey, whose hand he kissed first (as always customary, such being his great authority), and immediately afterwards paid his respects to the King, addressing him in such form as written to the Senate.

The Queen is of low stature, rather stout (*grassetta*) with a modest countenance (*di faccia onesta*); she is virtuous, just, replete with goodness and religion; she speaks Spanish, Flemish, French, and English; she is beloved by the islanders more than any Queen that ever reigned; she is about forty-five years old, having lived thirty years in England, from the time of her first marriage. By the present Henry, she had two sons and one daughter. The eldest [293] son died at the age of six months, the younger immediately after his christening; her daughter alone survives. She is sixteen years old; a handsome, amiable (*graziosa*) and very accomplished Princess, in no respect inferior to her mother.

The King has also a natural son,² born to him of the widow of one of his Peers; a youth of great promise, so much does he resemble his father.

In this eighth Henry, God combined such corporal and mental beauty, as not merely to surprise but to astound all men. Who could fail to be struck with admiration on perceiving the lofty position of so glorious a Prince to be in such accordance with his stature, giving manifest proof of that intrinsic mental superiority which is inherent to him? His face is angelic rather than handsome; his head imperial (*Cesarina*) and bald, and he wears a beard, contrary to English custom. Who would not be amazed when contemplating such singular corporal beauty, coupled with such bold address, adapting itself with the greatest ease to every manly exercise. He sits his horse well, and manages him yet better; he jousts and wields his spear, throws the quoit, and draws the bow, admirably; plays at tennis most dexterously; and nature having endowed him in youth with such gifts, he was not slow to enhance, preserve, and augment them with all industry and labour. It seeming to him monstrous for a Prince not to cultivate moral and intellectual excellence, so from childhood he applied himself to grammatical studies, and then to philosophy and holy writ, thus obtaining the reputation of a lettered and excellent Prince. Besides the Latin and his native tongue, he learned Spanish, French, and Italian. He is kind and affable, full of graciousness and courtesy, and liberal; particularly so to men of science (*virtuosi*) whom he is never weary of obliging.

Although always intelligent and judicious, he nevertheless allowed himself to be so allured by his pleasures, that, accustomed to ease, he for many years left the administration of the government to his ministers, well nigh until the persecution of Cardinal Wolsey; but from that time forth he took such delight in his own rule, that from liberal he became avaricious, and whereas heretofore no one departed from his Majesty without being well rewarded, so now all quit his presence dissatisfied. He appears to be religious; he usually

1 The date of the delivery of this report is derived from Sanuto's Diaries.

2 Henry Fitzroy, natural son of Henry VIII. by Elizabeth, daughter of Sir John Blount, knight, and widow of Gilbert, Lord Talboys. (See "Burke's Extinct Peerages" p. 207.)

hears two low masses [daily?], and on holy days high mass likewise. He gives many alms, relieving paupers, orphans,³ widows, and cripples; his almoner disbursing annually ten thousand golden ducats for this purpose.

[Then follows an account of the geographical position of England, Scotland, and Ireland.]

The climate is neither warm nor cold, but very damp. In the northern parts [of England] the longest day is of nineteen hours, and of sixteen and a half to the southward. [294]

The language of the English, Welch, and Cornishmen is so different that they do not understand each other. The Welchman is sturdy, poor, adapted to war, and sociable (*conversevole*); the Cornishman is poor, rough, and boorish (*selvatico*); and the Englishman mercantile, rich, affable, and generous (*nobile*). The men are for the most part tall of stature and robust, and far above all, the Welch.

The island is not mountainous but level, and merely girt by many hills, which yield no fruit, but a quantity of lead, tin, silver, gold, and other metals; and were they to smelt the minerals more carefully the product would be greater.

The soil is reddish, and sufficiently cultivated for their maintenance, with wheat, barley, and spelt (*spelta*) [rye?], the rest is laid out in very beautiful (*bellissime*) meadows and most profitable pasturages for cattle and innumerable flocks of sheep, which remain the whole year in the open air; so that the English are extremely well supplied with the best wool, which they convert into every sort of superfine cloth; and their amount of hides is incredible.

The olive and the vine have, however, been denied them, instead of which they use malt liquor, made with crab-apples and hops, and other ingredients, from which, by boiling them, they obtain a drink as intoxicating as the strongest wine.

The island is ennobled by 22 cathedral cities; 50 towns, some walled and some open; and 1300 (*sic*) villages, the whole being divided into 35 counties.

Four times a year, the King sends into each of the counties three judges in ordinary, for civil and criminal causes, with appeal to his Majesty's Council.

The first and most honourable office in the kingdom is that of Lord High Constable, which on account of its pre-eminence has not been conferred on any one [since the execution of the last High Constable, the Duke of Buckingham, in 1521], and remains in the gift of the King.

There were formerly twelve Dukes, but in consequence of disobedience and rebellion, nine of the duchies have been annexed to the Crown, and three remain—that of Richmond, conferred on his Majesty's natural son, who is Lord High Admiral, with a revenue of 10,000 ducats; that of Norfolk, who is Lord High Treasurer and his Majesty's chief vassal, with a revenue of 20,000 ducats; and the third duchy, that of Suffolk, in the person of the Lord Marshal [Charles Brandon], with a revenue of 30,000 ducats. He is 61 years of age, very robust, and although not of very noble lineage, yet as he has for wife his Majesty's sister, widow of King Lewis of France, much honour and respect are paid him; and he has the second scat in his Majesty's Privy Council, which he rarely enters, save for the discussion of matters of a certain importance, passing his time more pleasantly in other amusements.

His Excellency the Duke of Norfolk [Thomas Howard, third Duke of Norfolk] is of very noble English descent. His Majesty makes use of him in all negotiations more than any other person. Since the death of Cardinal Wolsey, his authority and supremacy have increased, and every employment (*tutti gli ufficij*) devolves to [295] him. He is prudent, liberal, affable (*piacevole*) and astute; associates with everybody, has very great experience in political government (*è praticissimo dell' amministrazioni regali*) discusses the affairs of the world admirably, aspires to greater elevation, and bears ill-will to foreigners, especially to our Venetian nation. He is 58 years old; small and spare in person, and his hair black. He has two sons.

The Lord Great Chamberlain, Captain of the Island (*Capitano dell' Isola*) the Earl

3 "Pupilli;" literally, wards or minors

of Oxford [John de Vere, 15th Earl of Oxford], is a man of valour and authority, with a revenue of 25,000 ducats, and it is his custom always to cavalcade with 200 horse.

There are also two marquises. One of Exeter [Edward Courtenay] with an annual revenue of 20,000 ducats; thirty years old, the King's cousin-german, being descended from the sister of his Majesty's mother, and next in succession to the Crown.

The other is the Marquis of Dorset, a youth eighteen years of age, with a revenue of 15,000 ducats. He is under charge of the Court of Wards, which requires feudatories to remain dependent on his Majesty, if orphans, until their twentieth year, after which age no one can prosecute them (*nessuno può dimandar li in giudizio*).

The counties and baronies yield 214,000 ducats; and as the King disposes of all the above-named dignities at pleasure, they render his Majesty very powerful.

To proceed now to the order of prelates, which has always been wealthy and revered,—there are twenty-two sees in England, comprising the two archbishoprics. The Primate, Archbishop of Canterbury, has an income of 25,000 ducats, and it is unlawful for any one to appeal against his decrees to Rome. The other, the Archbishopric of York, held lately by Cardinal Wolsey, yields 18,000 ducats, and according to the statutes is now in possession of the Crown, and will remain thus at least for one year after his death, according to custom.

The other twenty bishoprics yield, one with another, 40,000 ducats (*sic*). There are three priories of St. John's of Jerusalem [Knights of Rhodes], with a revenue of 25,000 ducats.

The religious orders of St. Austin and St. Bernard, including three Carthusian monasteries, have in all an income of 150,000 ducats.

It is also marvellous to see throughout the island 38,000 churches, excellently endowed with an infinite number of priests, the collation of all which offices and benefices appertains to the Crown alone, being reasonably conceded and confirmed by the Pope.

[Then follows an account of the origin of the payment to Rome of Peter's Pence, ending thus:—]

The annual tribute to the Church of Rome is still levied by his Holiness's collector. The English call it "Peter's Pence" and for this reason, as feudatories, they receive investiture from the Roman Pontiffs.

The very fortunate (*felicissimo*) kingdom of England has never lacked good laws; her most enlightened (*virtuosissimi*) sovereigns, for the introduction of scientific literature (*buone lettere*) having [296] built two universities, one at Cambridge, and the other at Oxford, where 3,000 students are constantly instructed by most excellent masters, in every literary science, free of all expense, until they take their doctor's degree. These universities have produced many excellent and illustrious men, and hence it comes that many English speak Latin (*latinamente*) and annotate holy writ, on which they are now not a little intent, entertaining opinions totally opposed to the Roman Church; and their number would increase daily, were they not purged with fire and sword—antidotes which the prelates administer frequently.

The city of London has a most noble bridge, on which are lofty edifices, with shops containing goods of all sorts, and in its centre a most beautiful church, to be seen rather than described.

The Tower, although washed by the Thames, and surrounded by walls, is not a strong fortress. The King keeps his artillery and ammunition there; and there he coins his money, which is of much lower standard than it used to be. The Tower is garrisoned by a captain with a few foot soldiers, and their retainers (*è la loro famigliuola*). All criminals of importance are confined there. The English say that the castle was built by Julius Caesar, and on this they pride themselves.

The whole city is divided into 26 wards, and 86 parishes, with a population of 70,000 souls.

The government of the city of London is exercised by the Lord Mayor, who is elected by 24 aldermen; who, after having served as apprentices, and having by industry and

ability become rich and freemen, are made electors, and called aldermen.

Immediately on his election, the mayor goes in great state to the King, who knights him, and he is presented with the Sword of Justice, which he is bound to have carried before him whenever he rides processionally. The dignity is apparent rather than real, and very expensive.

The law courts, five in number, sit in a hall of the King's palace at Westminster, each court making its own awards separately.

At the first, which is called "the King's Bench," the most just and virtuous Chancellor More presides, a most eminent and lettered (*letteratissimo*) doctor of laws, adapted to any intricate (*ruginoso*) negotiation whatever; a man replete with goodness and religion, so that the sentences of the other courts are deservedly judged and ratified aright by his excellency.

At the second [Court of Common Pleas], audience is given by the coif doctors, who take the name from the cap worn under their bonnets.

At the third [Court of Exchequer], disputes about customs, duties, and gabels are decided.

The fourth [Court of Chancery] is that of the senior master,⁴ who acts rather for the despatch of litigants than as judge.

All are judges for life (*perpetui*) each receiving a salary of 500 ducats from the royal treasury. [297]

In criminal causes, speedy and vigorous justice is done, and of the four law terms (which are held annually), it is certain that not one passes without the condemnation to death of some 25 or 30 men.

The Lord Chief Justice [of the King's Bench], who is charged with the criminal legislation, is bound to proceed thus: after the arrest of the culprits, his excellency goes to the prison, and having them brought before him, appoints 12 jurymen (*giudici*) for their despatch, against whom there is no appeal.

When the King requires pecuniary supply or any other assistance concerning all his subjects, he assembles the general Parliament of the chief personages of the island, in number 400. On their meeting, after celebrating the mass of the Holy Ghost, his Majesty's Privy Council goes to the Upper House and proposes his demand, concerning which any member is at liberty to state his opinion freely, for the general benefit of the realm; and after the debates, each member is bound to give his vote and decide the matter proposed.

In this Parliament many things have been determined on several occasions; and, amongst the rest, eight years ago, under the name of a loan, his Majesty obtained about a million and a half of gold, with which to make war on France. The Parliament also decreed that his Majesty was supreme spiritual judge,⁵ he delegating his authority to the Archbishop of Canterbury [William Warham], It was, moreover, declared that many prelates had infringed the statute [of *præmunire*] which confiscated all their property to the Crown in case of disobedience, but the delinquents were exempted from the penalties incurred by them, on payment of 500,000 ducats.

In all its acts (*disposizioni*) the Parliament never departs from the will of the King and his Privy Council, which manages everything as he pleases.

The members of the Privy Council are the Dukes of Norfolk and Suffolk, the Earl of "Wiltshire (the favourite's father); the magnifico Fitzwilliam, the treasurer of the household;⁶ the Earl of Shrewsbury, lord steward [of the household]; the comptroller general [or Chancellor of the Exchequer?], Lord Darcy [?] K.G., (*il maggior Contarvolo Ary (sic) cavaliere dell' ordine*); **Thomas Cromwell**, and Doctor Stephen [Gardiner], his Majesty's secretary.

4 "Degan Consigliero." In Venetian "Degan" signifies "Senior."

5 "Protector and only Supreme Head of the Church and Clergy of England." (See Froude, vol. i. p. 279, date February 1531.)

6 Sir William Fitzwilliam, K.G., afterwards Earl of Southampton. (See "Burke's Extinct Peerages," pp. 212, 213.)

His Majesty's rule also extends to the island of Ireland, where he possesses the sea coast (*le maritime parti estreme*) and is master there. The island is large and populous, the natives warlike and wild, especially inland, where under the doublet (*corsetto*) they wear a shirt steeped in saffron (*zafferanata*) on account of the lice, and half-hose from the knee downwards. The government used to be in the hands of prelates, so that well nigh the whole island is divided into abbasies and temporal bishoprics, and the Pope even now has his collector there. [298]

In Picardy his Majesty possesses Calais and Guisnes, and Grave-lines near Flanders.

Such, in short, is the entire kingdom of the English Crown, whose wealth depends on England alone, which abounds in sheep, rabbits (*conigli*) oxen horses, lead, tin, iron, and gold and silver, as aforesaid.

The exports of the island amount to two millions of gold, and the imports are of the same value.

His Majesty's ordinary revenue is 525,000 ducats, derived from the following sources:—

From the Crown	Ducats	190,000	
From the customs	"	150,000	
From vacant benefices	"	40,000	
From the seal	"	10,000	
From rebels [property confiscated?]	"	50,000	
From towns on the continent	"	10,000	
From fines [?] (<i>dal madeficio</i>)	"	25,000	
From the Court of Wards	"	50,000	

Although it is difficult to know what ready money the King has, I nevertheless heard from a trustworthy person that the sum amounts to about a million of gold; he having already spent the six millions left him by his father, in the wars against France, Flanders, and Scotland.

From his most Christian Majesty there is due to King Henry 800,000 ducats for arrears on account of the annual pension of 50,000 ducats for Brittany; and 400,000 for money lent.

By means of imposts, and taxes extraordinary, the King can raise two millions of gold whenever he chooses.

His Majesty spends in ordinary 425,000 ducats for his Court, which consists of 500 men; namely, twenty-six gentlemen of the chamber (*camerieri*) one of whom is treasurer of the chamber; the lord steward, the chamberlain, his substitute, who carries a white stick to mark his office; the treasurer of the household (*il tesoriero generate*) who disburses the money; the comptroller general [?] (*il contarvolo*) who distributes it; the cofferers, who spend it; the master of the horse (*gran scudier*) who has charge of the horses, in number 300, including Barbs, Turks, coursers (*corridori*) hackneys, geldings, and chargers; and there are eight chaplains, one of whom is almoner; besides other gentlemen.

His Majesty has also in his pay three hundred halberdiers, ten of whom mount guard every night in the hall adjoining the King's chamber.

The particulars of his Majesty's personal expenditure are as follows:—

For the maintenance of his Court	Ducats	100,000	
For presents	"	120,000	
For the cavalry	"	20,000	
For parks and game preserves	"	50,000	
For soldiers in the fortresses and at the passes	"	30,000	[299]
For his Majesty's chamber	Ducats	30,000	
For buildings	"	10,000	
For alms	"	10,000	
For ambassadors and couriers	"	40,000	
For the expenses of the Queen and Princess	"	30,000 ⁷	

⁷ The total of this sum, 440,000 ducats, exceeds by 15,000 ducats the amount of 425,000,

The utmost military force which his Majesty could bring into the field would be 4,000 light cavalry and 100 spears. He might muster 60,000 infantry, who, although they fight in the old fashion, with bow, sword, buckler, sallet (*celata*) and a two-pronged iron stake to resist a charge from the enemy's horse, yet are they beginning to use harquebuses and artillery, nor do they fear death. When in the field, they endeavour to give the enemy battle instantly, as they cannot hold out (*non si sanno trattenere*) and when hostilities are protracted, they surrender. By so much the less as they fear the French, by so much the more they fear the Scots. They are always bound to serve without pay forty days, and then receive 3½ crowns (*scudi*) on the expiration of each month's service [?] (*a paghe servite*).⁸

By sea, his Majesty could arm 150 sail. He has six large ships in the island, a galleon, and two galleys, which were built during the war with France.

It merely remains for me to discuss the friendly relations between foreign powers and his Majesty, to state my opinion concerning the probable result of the divorce, and to say a few words about Cardinal Wolsey, with which this my report will conclude.

To commence with the Pope, the King holds his Holiness in small account, because he has not chosen to grant him the divorce; and God grant that the consequence may not prove profitable to the English Crown, and injurious to the Roman Church, from which his Majesty seems evidently bent on detaching himself and annexing, the [ecclesiastical?] revenues to the Crown, which would enrich him to the amount of six millions of ducats annually.

The Emperor has cause not only to hate the King of England, but to be his perpetual enemy, on account of the Queen, his aunt.

This same reason has obtained for the King of England the enmity of Ferdinand, and of the King of Portugal; the one the brother, the other the brother-in-law of the Emperor.

Between Poland and England there is no understanding whatever.

With Denmark, although the kingdom belongs to King Christian, the Emperor's brother-in-law, the two countries are nevertheless joined together by neighbourhood and fear, and, in my opinion, they will always remain so by reason of existing circumstances.

With your Serenity the King seems to remain on friendly terms, from which he might easily swerve, because you did not assent to his request about the divorce, as amply stated to the Signory by the English ambassadors. [300]

With the Dukes of Milan and Ferrara and the Florentine Signory and other Italian Powers there are no relations; nor have they the means of benefiting each other mutually.

With France, King Henry has formed a close friendship; enmity on account of his imprisonment, ancient rivalry, and former injuries, taking much more effect upon King Francis than his recent marriage to the Emperor's sister. The English sovereign is compelled to make this alliance on account of the divorce, which he is determined to effect, wishing beyond measure for a legitimate male heir; and having lost the hope that one should be born to him by Madame Katharine, so the marriage with his favourite, the daughter of the Earl of Wiltshire, will doubtless take place, and speedily.

This event might easily prove a source of trouble to the King, should the Queen's faction rebel; her Majesty being so loved and respected, that the people already commence murmuring; and were the faction to produce a leader, it is certain that the English nation, so naturally prone to innovation and change, would take up arms for the Queen, and by so much the more, were it arranged for the leader to marry the Princess [Mary], although by English law females are excluded from the throne.

The close of this my report will consist of a brief biography of Cardinal Wolsey, who, born in an insignificant place (*in loco basso*) and of mean parentage, applied himself to classical studies, in which being fully instructed he on various occasions took service as

mentioned above.

8 I believe that in this sense "paghe" signifies the period of service. In the year 1507 the pay of a German foot soldier was four Rhenish guilders per month. (See Report of Vincenzo Quirini.) I do not know the value of the "scudo," quoted by Falier but I suppose it may be rated at four shillings. (See Ruding, vol. ii. p. 417.)

pedagogue in the families of great personages,⁹ through whose means he obtained a priest's benefice,¹⁰ and frequented the Court, where, having renounced schooling, he convinced himself that he should at length succeed, following it actively,¹¹ and managing so well (*et tanto seppe fare*) that through his ready wit he became chaplain and almoner to Henry VII. of blessed memory, and had such success with Henry VIII. that he was made Bishop and Cardinal, with papal power. Having achieved so high a position, the King and kingdom were in his sole hands, and he disposed of everything in his own fashion as King and Pope. Very great respect was therefore shown him by all the Powers, whose affairs were always negotiated with his right reverend lordship.

His ordinary revenue amounted to 150,000 ducats, besides the many presents received both from the native English and from foreign sovereigns, especially from France, with whom he maintained a very close friendship. His court was far more magnificent than that of the King; he spent his whole income; was supremely proud (*superbissimo*) and chose to be adored as God, not [merely] honoured and revered as a Prince [of the Church]. [301]

At the peace recently made with France, the French ambassadors, by his advice, whispered to the King that by cohabiting with his brother's widow, he was living in mortal sin and contrary to the Christian religion. The King giving ear to this, bethought him of many things, which he communicated to the Cardinal, who, having treated to give him the most Christian King's sister, now married to the King of Navarre, greatly commended his opinions and confirmed him in them, promising to prevail upon the Pope to annul the marriage; and having written to Rome accordingly, his Holiness, by reason of the discord between the Emperor and the Church, sent Cardinal Campeggio to England with full papal authority, so that either conjointly with Cardinal Wolsey, or alone (*et soli*) he might pass sentence definitely.

The Cardinals having given several audiences in public to the advocates of the King and Queen, in the presence of their Majesties, who attended the debate, deferred the sentence so long that peace was made between the Emperor and the Pope; whereupon his Holiness, having cooled, recalled Cardinal Campeggio, and Wolsey perceiving that were judgment given in favour of the King, his Majesty would marry his favourite Madame Anne, niece of the Duke of Norfolk, who together with the Earl, her father, would oust him from the government, he in like manner changed his original purpose, feeding the King with words, until the arrival from Rome of the letters of suspension (*le lettere delta suspensione*) so that everything remained incomplete; and his Majesty being thus duped, commenced most wrathfully persecuting Wolsey, whom he deprived of the prime ministry, and confined him to his diocese of York.

The Cardinal having had such a fall, and being brought so low, commenced plotting with the Pope against the Crown, and was therefore condemned to perpetual imprisonment in the Tower. On his way to that place he died in misery, of a broken heart, abandoned by all men.

9 "Si mise alla pedanteria in servizio dei primi Signori in diversi tempi." The literal translation would be "took to pedantry." Cavendish merely mentions his having been tutor to the sons of the Marquis of Dorset; nor until now did I know that Wolsey had been pedagogue in other families, but perhaps the fact was notorious in 1531

10 "Acquistò la pretaria." (See also Cavendish, p. 2.)

11 "Nella quale si persuase al fine di riuscire dove lasciata la pedanteria seguila gagliardamente."