

HENRY VIII

(1509–1547)

King Henry is twenty nine years old, and much handsomer than any other sovereign in Christendom—a great deal handsomer than the King of France. He is very fair, and his whole frame admirably proportioned. Hearing that King Francis wore a beard, he allowed his own to grow, and as it was reddish, he had then got a beard which looked like gold. He is very accomplished and a good musician; composes well; is a capital horseman, and a fine joustier; speaks good French, Latin and Spanish; is very religious; heard three masses daily when he hunted, and sometimes five on other days . . . He is extremely fond of hunting, and never takes that diversion without tiring eight or ten horses, which he causes to be stationed beforehand along the line of country he means to take. He is also fond of tennis, at which game it is the prettiest thing in the world to see him play; his fair skin glowing through a shirt of the finest texture.

(Sebastian Giustinian, *Calendar of State Papers*, Venetian, ii, no. 1287, 1519)

THE sense of power exuded by Henry in his portraits reflects personal and political strength. He was a man of vast proportions, with a magnificent physique until he declined into grossness in later years. He had abundant energy and vitality. In addition, his reign witnessed a remarkable extension in the theoretical claims of the monarchy. The older forms of address as 'Your Grace' or 'Your Highness' were finally laid aside for 'Your Majesty', and there was a marked increase in court ceremony. The chief success of the monarchy was in establishing its claim to represent national sovereignty by extruding any rival authority. First, papal jurisdiction was cut down by a series of Acts, particularly that of 1533 forbidding appeals to Rome, on the grounds that England was an empire, governed by one supreme head and king 'with plenary, whole and entire power'. The next step was to assert royal authority over the Church. Another statute of 1534 recognized that the king was 'the only supreme head of the Church of England called *Anglicana Ecclesia*, with 'full power and authority' to amend or reform any abuses or errors therein.



The early years of Henry's marriage to Catherine appear to have been happy, even idyllic. There was no obvious reason why the birth in 1510 of a still-born daughter should cast too long a shadow. But by 1525 Catherine was forty, and repeated pregnancies had produced only one surviving child, the Princess Mary, born in 1516. The five years by which Catherine was older than Henry were now