

A. D. 1540. 6th Jan. aversion to her, to complete the marriage; and he told Cromwell, that since matters had gone so far, he must put his neck into the yoke. Cromwell, who knew how much his own interests were concerned in this affair, was very anxious to learn from the king, next morning after the marriage, whether he now liked his spouse any better. The king told him that he hated her worse than ever; and that her person was more disgusting on a near approach: he was resolved never to meddle with her; and even suspected her not to be a true maid: a point, about which he entertained an extreme delicacy. He continued, however, to be civil to Anne; he even seemed to repose his usual confidence in Cromwell; but though he exerted this command over himself, a discontent lay lurking in his breast, and was ready to burst out on the first opportunity.

12th April. A session of parliament was held; and a parliament. none of the abbots were now allowed a place in the House of Peers. The king, by the mouth of the chancellor, complained to the parliament of the great diversity of religions which still prevailed among his subjects: a grievance, he affirmed, which ought the less to be endured, because the Scriptures were now published in English, and ought universally to be the standard of belief to all mankind. But he had appointed, he said, some bishops and divines to draw up a list of tenets, to which the people were to assent; and he was determined that Christ, the doctrine of Christ, and the truth, should have the victory. The king seems to have expected more effect in ascertaining truth, from this new book of his doctors, than had ensued from the publication of the Scriptures. Cromwell, as vicar-general, made also, in the king's name, a speech to the upper House; and the peers, in return, bestowed great flattery on him, and in particular said, that he was worthy, by his desert, to be vicar-general of the universe. That minister seemed to be no less in his master's good graces: he received, soon after the sitting of the parliament, the title of Earl of Essex, and was installed knight of the garter.

There remained only one religious order in England; the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem, or the Knights of Malta, as they are commonly called. This order, partly ecclesiastical, partly military, had, by their valour, done great service to Christendom; and had very much retarded at Jerusalem, Rhodes, and Malta, the rapid progress of the barbarians. During the general surrender of the religious houses in England, they had exerted their spirit, and had obstinately refused to yield up their revenues to the king; and Henry, who would endure no society that professed obedience to the Pope, was obliged to have recourse to parliament for the dissolution of this order. Their revenues were large, and formed an addition nowise contemptible to the many acquisitions which the king had already made. But he had very ill husbanded the great revenue acquired by the plunder of the church: his profuse generosity dissipated faster than his rapacity could supply; and the parliament was surprised this session to find a demand made upon them of four-tenths, and a subsidy of one shilling in the pound during two years: so ill were the public expectations answered, that the crown was never more to require any supply from the people. The Commons, though lavish of their liberty, and of the blood of their fellow-subjects, were extremely frugal of their money; and it was not without difficulty so small a grant could be obtained by this absolute and dreaded monarch. The convocation gave the king four shillings in the pound, to be levied in two years. The pretext for these grants was the great expense which Henry had undergone for the defence of the realm, in building forts along the sea-coast, and in equipping a navy. As he had at present no ally on the continent in whom he reposed much confidence, he relied only on his domestic strength, and was, on that account, obliged to be more expensive in his preparations against the danger of an invasion.

The king's favour to Cromwell, and his acquiescence in the marriage with Anne of Cleves, were both of them deceitful appearances: his aversion to the queen secretly increased every day; and having at last broken all restraint,

it prompted him at once to seek the dissolution of a marriage so odious to him, and to involve his minister in ruin, who had been the innocent author of it. Fall of Cromwell. The fall of Cromwell was hastened by other causes. All the nobility hated a man, who, being of such low extraction, had not only mounted above them by his station of vicar-general, but had engrossed many of the other considerable offices of the crown: besides enjoying that commission which gave him a high and almost absolute authority over the clergy, and even over the laity, he was privy seal, chamberlain, and master of the wards: he had also obtained the order of the garter, a dignity which had ever been conferred only on men of illustrious families, and which seemed to be profaned by its being communicated to so mean a person. The people were averse to him, as the supposed author of the violence on the monasteries; establishments which were still revered and beloved by the commonalty. The catholics regarded him as the concealed enemy of their religion: the protestants, observing his exterior concurrence with all the persecutions exercised against them, were inclined to bear him as little favour; and reproached him with the timidity, if not treachery, of his conduct. And the king, who found that great clamours had, on all hands, arisen against the administration, was not displeased to throw on Cromwell the load of public hatred; and he hoped, by making so easy a sacrifice, to regain the affections of his subjects.

But there was another cause which suddenly set all these motives in action, and brought about an unexpected revolution in the ministry. The king had fixed his affections on Catherine Howard, niece to the Duke of Norfolk; and being determined to gratify this new passion, he could find no expedient, but by procuring a divorce from his present consort, to raise Catherine to his bed and throne. The duke, who had long been engaged in enmity with Cromwell, made the same use of her insinuations to ruin this minister, that he had formerly done of Anne Boleyn's against Wolsey: and when all engines were prepared, he obtained a commission from the king to arrest Cromwell at the council table, on an accusation of high treason, and to commit him to the Tower. Immediately after, a bill of attainder was framed against him; and the House of Peers thought proper, without trial, examination, or evidence, to condemn to death a man, whom, a few days before, they had declared worthy to be vicar-general of the universe. The House of Commons passed the bill, though not without some opposition. Cromwell was accused of heresy and treason; but the proofs of his treasonable practices are utterly improbable, and even absolutely ridiculous.^t The only circumstance of his conduct by which he seems to have merited this fate, was his being the instrument of the king's tyranny, in conducting like iniquitous bills in the preceding session, against the Countess of Salisbury and others.

Cromwell endeavoured to soften the king by the most humble supplications; but all to no purpose: it was not the practice of that prince to ruin his ministers and favourites by halves; and though the unhappy prisoner once wrote to him in so moving a strain as even to draw tears from his eyes, he hardened himself against all movements of pity, and refused his pardon. The conclusion of Cromwell's letter ran in these words: "I, a most woful prisoner, am ready to submit to death when it shall please God and your majesty; and yet the frail flesh incites me to call to your grace for mercy and pardon of mine offences. Written at the Tower with the heavy heart and trembling hand of your highness's most miserable prisoner, and poor slave, Thomas Cromwell." And a little below, "Most gracious prince, I cry for mercy, mercy, mercy."^u When brought to the place of execution, he 28th July. avoided all earnest protestations of his inno- His execution. cence, and all complaints against the sentence pronounced upon him. He knew that Henry would resent on his son those symptoms of opposition to his will, and that his death alone would not terminate that monarch's vengeance. He was a man of prudence, industry, and abilities; worthy of a better master and of a better fate. Though raised to the summit of power from a low origin, he betrayed no

^t Burnet, vol. i. p. 278.

^u Ibid. p. 281, 282.