

Book of the Week.

THE FIFTH QUEEN.*

Mr. Ford Madox Hueffer has achieved no small success in his new historical novel. "The Fifth Queen" is wonderfully convincing. It is the story, or rather, the early part of the story, of the ill-fated Katherine Howard. The portraits of Cromwell, of Henry, of the grim and implacable Princess Mary, of Throckmorton the spy, and of the ladies of the Court, are all astonishingly drawn. They transport you bodily into the ferment of those unrestful times, into the queer mixture of learning and brutality, of courage and treachery, of progress and superstition—the travail out of which later was to arise the spacious England of Elizabeth.

The public appearance of the hapless Anne of Cleves, the chagrin of Cromwell at the miscarriage of his scheme for a Protestant alliance, the way in which the keen man topped that wave which all deemed would overwhelm him, and, above all, the anguish of the King's eternal vacillation stands out before us, illuminating a section of the past for a few moments, as Browning's Pope saw Rome illumined by the lighting flash.

A weak king will make a Court of spies, liars, intriguers. A king whose mind can be changed will have that mind exploited for ever and ever by the ignoble army of plotters, with axes to grind, sometimes of contemptible smallness. Henry's great ability increased, not diminished, his infirmity of purpose. He saw first one side of a subject, then another; would bastardise his eldest daughter, then wish to propitiate her; would defy the Pope, but trembled with horror when he found his subjects would tamper with the Faith itself. In all the welter of conflicting factions, the widowed King had no creature to give him help or love or sympathy. There was nobody to whom he could cry in his tortures of bodily pain, in his daily wrestle of mind. Menaced by enemies, used by those who professed to be his friends, surrounded by traitors, no wonder his life culminated in a very fury of massacre, of cutting off all suspected persons—an almost insane desire to free himself from the intolerable bondage of the life he lived.

This wonderful capacity of Mr. Hueffer's makes one wish that he had better regarded historical facts. I speak here with some hesitation, my only record of the career of Katharine Howard being that given by Miss Strickland in her "Lives of the Queens." Now Agnes Strickland, herself a Romanist, would be likely to say what could be said for the luckless girl. But State papers are hardly to be confuted; and an account of Katharine which makes no mention at all of Francis Derham must surely be an incomplete account. Katharine, in the picture Mr. Hueffer gives, came to Court fresh from the poverty and rusticity of her Lincolnshire home. But it is surely not open to question that Katharine came to London aged between twelve and thirteen to live in the household of her Aunt, the Duchess of Norfolk, who afterwards so nearly suffered for her sake, in her downfall. And also it is a fact not to be challenged, that Francis

Derham and Katharine were troth-plight when she was in her earliest teens, and that the scandal of their relations was undoubted, and caused his dismissal from the Duke's household. From all we read, we gather that the unhappy girl was far more sinned against than sinning, having been from childhood the kind of woman who involuntarily attracts men's desires. Mr. Hueffer brings her cousin Culpeper into her story, with whom there is no proof that she was ever more than imprudent; but as regards Derham, the poor creature's evil angel, he is altogether silent. Of the fidelity of the poor Katharine to the king after marriage, there is little doubt, nor as to the general modesty of her behaviour. But it is not disputed that she interviewed Culpeper late at night by stealth; and also admitted Derham to a post at Court. Surrounded as she was by blackmailers, she had hardly any choice in this matter probably. The whole story is of such absorbing interest that one would hear with delight that information which would clear Katharine of the gravest charge had come to light since Miss Strickland wrote. A pre-contract was no doubt at that time a justifiable reason for nullification of marriage; in fact, it was the pretext used in the case of Anne of Cleves. But Miss Strickland clearly gives us to understand that there was more than this in the relations of Katharine Howard and Francis Derham—relations which were an accomplished fact at the time of her coming to Court, but of which our author gives us no hint at all.

G. M. R.

The Sower.

(From the German of Claudius.)

The sower sows the seed.
The earth receives it. In a little while
The flower blossoms forth.

It was the best beloved
Of thy possessions; all else was but dross.
. . . . And then the flower died. . . .

Why weepest thou beside
Its grave, and raisest helpless hands against
The brooding cloud of death?

As grass upon the field
Men pass away; as dead leaves fluttering down.
Their days on earth are few.

The eagle from the heights
Visits the soil. Then, spreading pinions proud,
Returns unto the sun. H. F.

In the *Westminster Gazette*.

A Word for the Week.

A certain amount of opposition is a great help to a man. Kites rise against the wind. Even a head wind is better than none. No man ever worked his passage anywhere in a dead calm. Let no man, therefore, wax pale because of opposition.

*By Ford Madox Hueffer. (Alston Rivers.)

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)