

THE CARDINAL DUKE OF YORK

HENRY Stuart was born in 1725. He died in 1807 in his eighty-third year. The birth of his father, the Old Pretender, had been the occasion of James the Second's flight from England; and he himself lived to see the opening of negotiations for Catholic Emancipation in this country. He was created Cardinal at the unusually early age of twenty-two, and fourteen years later he was appointed to the bishopric of Frascati. In addition to this, he held the office of Dean of the Sacred College for the last four years of his life. Throughout this long and distinguished career he may be said to have had two interests, and two only, at heart: the service of his family and the service of his Church.

Of his devotion to the Stuart cause much has already been written. He has been alternately maligned by Hanoverian historians and whitewashed by the assiduous supporters of the White Rose League. The former have pointed with contempt rather than with pity to the spectacle of this last of the Royal Stuarts begging George the Third for a further subsidy to support him in his old age: while the latter have either blamed him for becoming a Cardinal or else reminded the world of his untiring attempts to secure Papal recognition for his brother as Charles the Third, and later of his own constant, if tactful, assertion of his rights to the English throne. But these desultory tracts of historical controversy are profitless for any save the most dauntless student of lost causes; and neither an emphatic condemnation of Henry Stuart's conduct nor his political rehabilitation would be likely to have any effect on modern life or thought.

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The ecclesiastical career of Henry Stuart, however, has never been thoroughly explored; and, if it were, it would perhaps not only clear much of the obscurity which at present surrounds his personality, but also provide a valuable contribution to the religious history of the period. The sources for such a life are unhappily scattered and in many cases unreliable. It would be necessary for such a work to extract the germs of truth from the oratorical rotundities of Mastrofini's 'Orazione,' to make a thorough study of the Cardinal's Diary and documents contained in the Tuscan State Papers, and above all to glean from contemporary records and letters any reference to the House of Stuart and its last male member. In this last category Sir Horace Mann's despatches from the Court must be dismissed as being of slight value; his references to Henry Stuart, which are always ill-natured and—it would seem—often unfair as well, are notable for that curious mixture of stupidity and shrewdness which has always been considered one of the main attributes of British Diplomacy. Several other correspondents, however, bring interesting light to bear on the youth of Henry Stuart. Samuel Crisp—the 'Daddy Crisp' of Fanny Burney—bestows especial praise on him on the occasion of the Masked Ball given at the Bolognetti Palace in 1739 in honour of Prince Leopold of Saxony. He speaks of the two sons of the Old Pretender as 'two as fine youths as ever I saw, particularly the youngest,' and later mentions Henry's accomplishments as a dancer and singer. Thomas Gray, the poet, similarly bears witness to Henry's good parts; but the most valuable source of information is undoubtedly to be found in the letters of the *Président* Charles de Brosses. The general impression obtained from these and similar sources is one of social charm, not without some early marks of piety. Englishmen visiting the capital at

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this time brought back eulogistic accounts of the young 'arbiter elegantiarum' who was already winning for himself a well-deserved reputation at the Roman Court. John Murray of Broughton, who was in Rome in 1741, foretold a brilliant military future for the second son of the Old Pretender, and saw in him not only a certain natural display of high spirits, but also the early signs of military and political ambition.

Yet Henry Stuart was to fulfil few of these expectations of his childhood; it must be acknowledged that his short-lived military career was a melancholy fiasco, and from 1746 onwards he neither sought nor obtained social distinction. Instead he virtually renounced the Stuart cause, and at the age of twenty-two took Holy Orders. It is not, however, difficult to account for this sudden move. It was the immediate result of the fruitless visit which he paid to France in 1746. This was a galling experience, one full of humiliation for him, and calculated to convince him of the fruitlessness of political intrigues and ambitions. He was treated by the Court of Louis XV with a disrespect amounting almost to insolence, and every attempt to help his brother in Scotland was doomed to failure.

It is curious to note the several effects that the failure of the 'Forty-five Rebellion produced on the two brothers. Charles, who joined Henry in October, 1746, was already a disgruntled and thwarted man, whose experience had taught him nothing save bitterness and disillusionment; he was but twenty-six years old at the time, and yet for practical purposes his career was at an end. The rest of his life was to furnish nothing but a melancholy account of ill-health, sordid love affairs, and a persistent addiction to 'the nasty bottle.'

Misfortune reacted on the younger brother in a totally different way; he turned his eyes—as it were—

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away from things transitory to things eternal, and within a short while acquainted his father with his decision to embrace the Religious Life.

How is one to explain this striking contrast between the lives of Charles and Henry Stuart? It would seem that the former had inherited most from his father's family, while the latter owed his character more to his mother Clementina Sobieska. This saintly lady had died when Henry was only six years old. She had lived a life of extreme holiness, and it was expected by many that formal application would be made for her Beatification. Actually this plea was never advanced; nevertheless, it has been established that she was a woman of unexampled piety and devotion. Such was the mother at whose knees Henry Stuart learnt his first lessons, and whose sainted memory he cherished throughout his life. And thus if Henry's ill-starred visit to France was the immediate occasion of his abandonment of temporal ambitions, the last cause of his vocation to the priesthood can be surely traced to his mother.

Never an influential figure in the Catholic Church, Henry Stuart maintained, however, for sixty years a position of prominence and responsibility. His interests lay more in the diocese of Frascati than in the antechambers of the Vatican. The part which he played in the four Conclaves at which he assisted was an insignificant one, and, in 1758, he openly courted opposition and ridicule by giving his support to the Imperial candidate. Thus, despite his abnormally long enjoyment of a cardinal's rank, he was never considered a likely candidate for the Papacy.

It was as an ordinary bishop that Henry Stuart desired to exert himself; and to gratify this wish Pope Clement XIII appointed him to the important diocese of Frascati. In the exercise of this office Henry Stuart showed a judicious blending of Stuart obstinacy

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with Sobieski wisdom; his private life was ruled alternately by Stuart extravagance and Sobieski asceticism. When alone he would lead a life of great self-denial and simplicity; rising early, he would devote most of the morning to study; the rest of the day would be occupied with interviews, episcopal business, and visits to the outlying parts of his diocese. During his early years he enriched and reorganised his Seminary, and throughout his career he maintained the most lively interest in its welfare. He quickly endeared himself to his flock by his never-failing care and generosity; under his auspices orphanages were founded and the sick cared for. There are still peasants to be found at Frascati whose parents knew and loved their cardinal of royal blood. Of his administrative ability Mastrofini, his panegyrist, says that 'he united all the generous ideas of a beneficent ruler with the zeal of a holy pastor.'

In contrast with this picture of the pious and ascetic Bishop of Frascati, the worthy son of Clementina Sobieska, there is another aspect of his character which cannot be ignored. For though Henry Stuart had renounced the world and all its vanities, he could not renounce his inheritance of Stuart blood. He was accustomed to entertain lavishly on every occasion which presented itself. On the day of his enthronement at Frascati the fountain in the Piazza Maggiore was made to flow with red wine; the entire population were regaled with a banquet, and when at last darkness fell on the scene of festivity, a display of fireworks lit up the city and the Campagna for miles around. He maintained an immense establishment and kept open house. Hospitable to a fault, he kept 'grooms, lacqueys and serving-men without number.' One curiously Stuart trait was his inordinate love of horses; he usually kept sixty in his stables, and he was wont to drive a team of six attached to his

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coach at full speed across the Campagna from Frascati to Rome. If anyone dared to outstrip him on such occasions his groom 'Gigi' had strict instructions to thrust a flaming torch into the rival horses' eyes. With tense, drawn features the Cardinal would sit forward in his coach, while his grooms spurred on the unfortunate steeds to still greater efforts. And in these wild exhibitions of speed the Cardinal was reckless as to the loss of life either to men or beasts.

This same sense of prodigality which the Cardinal Duke of York displayed in his recreation hours extended itself to some branches of his diocesan work as well. He spent fabulous sums collecting a library for his Seminary, and indulged the collector's passion for costly First Editions. The following is a typical instance of the Cardinal's recklessness in another sphere: once on hearing of a pestilential encampment of foreign casual labourers, called the Molara, where hitherto no priest had dared to set foot, he insisted on visiting the spot in person, bearing the Blessed Sacrament beneath a canopy of cloth-of-gold. It was a theatrical gesture in the same category as Charles the First's visit to the House of Commons to arrest the Five Members. But, unlike his ill-starred ancestor, he succeeded, and by his daring won the conversion of these godless men.

Nothing marks more clearly the extreme nobility of Henry Stuart than his behaviour under the stress of political events. When his brother came to Rome to obtain Papal recognition as successor to James III, Henry Stuart did everything in his power to assist him to that end; yet, once he had recorded his initial protest by driving through the streets of Rome with his brother on his right hand, he submitted with patience to the Pope's adverse decision. Similarly, on his brother's death, he stated plainly his claims to the throne with undiminished emphasis, but contented

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himself with retaining his title of Duke of York. It was evident to him that a prolonged Papal recognition of the Stuart claims could only result in postponing indefinitely Catholic Emancipation in England. At the time of the Napoleonic Invasion he behaved with that fortitude which was to be expected of a Stuart in persecution. One may venture to say that it was not until he was deprived of all his worldly possessions and driven forth from home that his heroic qualities became wholly evident; and, like his royal ancestor Charles I, he never appeared so noble as in adversity, nor so sublime as when heaped with indignities.

What, then, was the key to Henry Stuart Cardinal Duke of York's character? It is impossible to say; for as yet we have no deep or thorough insight into his personality. All that exists is a series of glimpses—minute cameos—whereby it is impossible to obtain more than a vague idea of the whole man as he really was.

There exists in the National Portrait Gallery a picture by Largillière of Henry Stuart when young; he has the Stuart head with the Sobieski eyes; unless the painter was a churlish flatterer, Henry must have been a ravishingly beautiful child. There is also an engraving of him at the age of twenty in a preposterous military hotch-potch of mediæval armour and classical drapery; here he is represented as an awkward youth of ungainly figure, with large dreamy eyes—it was at the period of his disillusionment, and one is struck by a certain sense of unworldliness in his bearing. But the most fascinating likeness is that by Pompeo Batoni, which represents him in his full Cardinal's robes. There is a delicacy in those features which neither his father nor his luckless grandfather possessed, a dignity more effective than that of any of his ill-fated ancestors, and an all-

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pervading sense of royalty which is not surpassed even in the most kingly portrait of Charles I.

But there is much that no portrait of Henry Stuart can tell us. In a few cases there are human descriptions to fill the deficiency. We have an intensely personal glimpse of Henry Stuart giving an encore of Corelli's 'Notte di Natale' at one of the brothers' concerts in the Palazzo di Santo Apostoli to gratify the *Président de Brosses*, who had arrived late. We see the designing Cardinal Tencin smuggling the disillusioned youth out of France in order that he may enter the Religious Life. We see the ascetic prelate rising long before dawn and hurrying through the deserted streets of his beloved Frascati on his way to pray at some neglected shrine; then later in the day setting out at furious speed across the green flat Campagna—the reincarnation of Prince Rupert himself. We see him at the height of his career, when ~~Vice-Chancellor of the Holy See, giving refuge to~~ *Louise of Stolborg*, the beautiful and maltreated wife of the Young Pretender, who in her turn duped her princely benefactor and carried on an intrigue within the very walls of the episcopal palace. And last of all we see him stricken with poverty accepting the Royal Pension with that Stuart dignity which could make the most humiliating acts appear honourable.

But still there are many gaps in the tale of his life, gulfs to bridge, transitions and developments to explain. To assemble the patchwork of evidence would be a lifelong labour; wearying, as it might prove, such a labour would be worth while; for thus, and thus alone, would it be possible to obtain a true and adequate picture of the Cardinal Duke of York. At present we have but the dim outlines of his figure. But dim as these are, they are enough to suggest that he was not only a great Stuart, but also a great Prince of the Church.

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