

Description of Henry VIII by the Venetian Ambassador 1519

His Majesty is twenty-nine years old and extremely handsome; nature could not have done more for him. He is much handsomer than any other sovereign in Christendom; a great deal handsomer than the king of France; very fair, and his whole frame admirably proportioned. On hearing that Francis I wore a beard, he allowed his own to grow, and, as it is reddish, he has now a beard that looks like gold. He is very accomplished, a good musician, composes well, is a most capital horseman, a fine joustier, speaks good French, Latin, and Spanish; is very religious,—hears three masses daily when he hunts, and sometimes five on other days. He hears the office every day in the queen's chamber,—that is to say, vespers and compline.

He is very fond of hunting, and never takes his diversion without tiring eight or ten horses, which he causes to be stationed beforehand along the line of country he means to take; and when one is tired he mounts another, and before he gets home they are all exhausted. He is extremely 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 finest texture. He gambles ... to the amount occasionally, it is said, of from six thousand to eight thousand ducats in a day.

He is affable and gracious, harms no one, does not covet his neighbor's goods, and is satisfied with his own dominions, having often said to me, "Sir ambassador, we want all potentates to content themselves with their own territories; we are satisfied with this island of ours." He seems extremely desirous of peace.

He is very rich. His father left him ten millions of ready money in gold, of which he is supposed to have spent one half in the war against France, when he had three armies on foot: one crossed the Channel with him, another was in the field against Scotland, and the third remained with the queen in reserve ...

The queen is the sister of the mother of the king of Spain, now styled King of the Romans. She is thirty-five years old and not handsome, though she has a very beautiful complexion. She is religious, and as virtuous as words can express. I have seen her but seldom.

The cardinal of York is of low origin, and has two brothers, one of whom holds an untitled benefice, and the other is pushing his fortune. He rules both the king and the entire kingdom. On my first arrival in England he used to say to me, "His Majesty will do so and so." Subsequently, by degrees, he forgot himself, and commenced saying, "We shall do so and so." At this present he has reached such a pitch that he says, "I shall do so and so." He is about forty-six years old, very handsome, learned, extremely eloquent, of vast ability, and indefatigable. He alone transacts as much business as that which occupies all the magistracies, offices, and councils of Venice, both civil and criminal; and all state affairs likewise are managed by him, let their nature be what it may.

Source: Robinson, James, ed. *Readings in European History*. Vol II. Boston & New York: Ginn & Co., 1904.¹

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